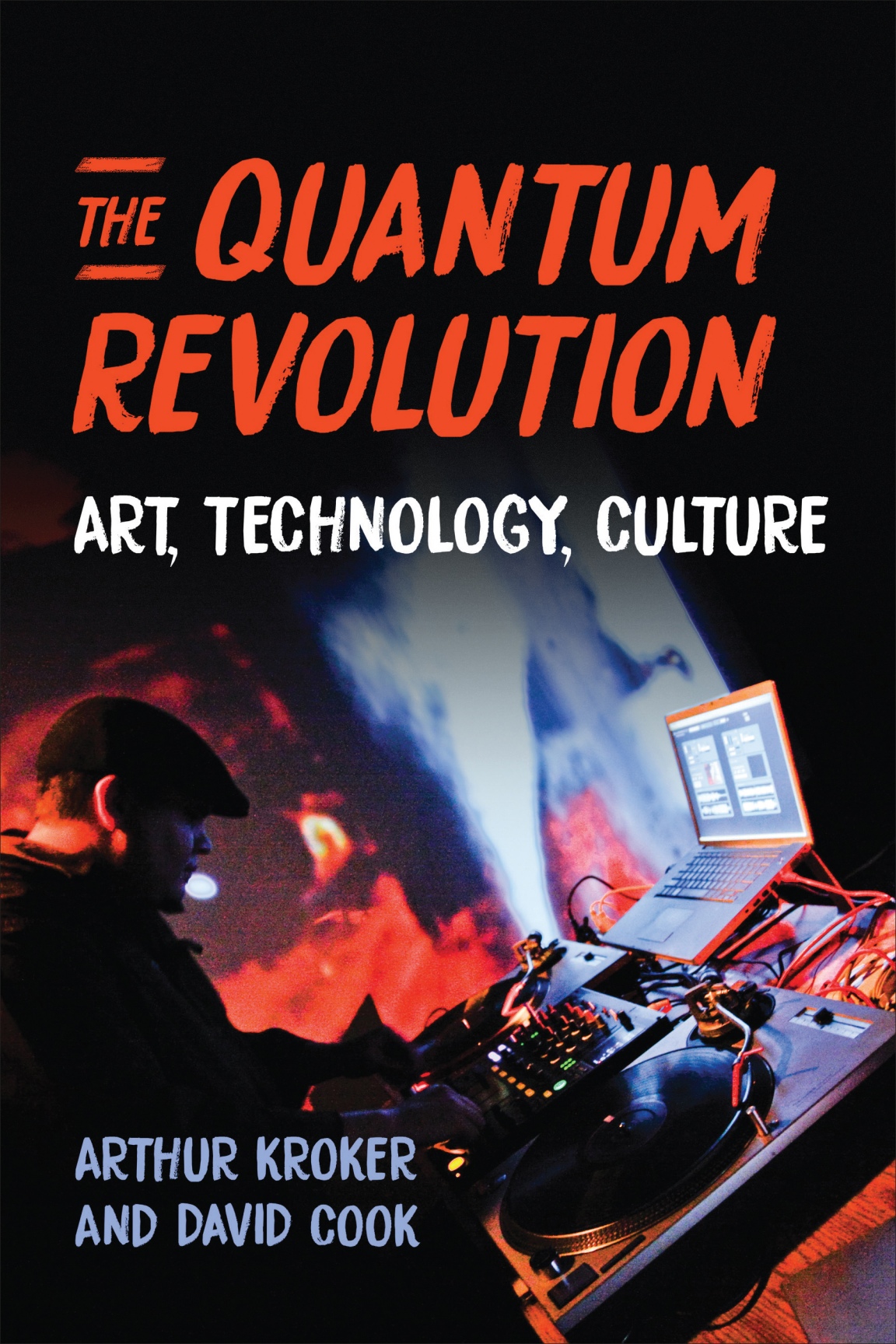


THE QUANTUM REVOLUTION

ART, TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE

**ARTHUR KROKER
AND DAVID COOK**



THE QUANTUM REVOLUTION

We are currently riders of the information storm. AI fascinates us, images mesmerize us, data defines us, algorithms remember us, news bombards us, devices connect us, isolation saddens us. Deeply embedded in digital technology, we are the very first inhabitants of life in the quantum zone. *The Quantum Revolution* is about life today – its entanglements, creativity, politics, and artistic vision.

Arthur Kroker and David Cook explore a new way of thinking drawn directly from the quantum imaginary itself. They explain the quantum revolution as everyday life, where technology moves fast, and where, under cover of the digital devices that connect us, the most sophisticated concepts of technology and science originating in mathematics, astrophysics, and biogenetics have swiftly flooded human consciousness, shaped social behaviour, and crafted individual identity. The book discusses the concept of the quantum zone as a new way of understanding digital culture, and presents stories about art, technology, and society, as well as a series of reflections on art as a gateway to understanding the quantum imaginary. Richly illustrated with sixty images of critically engaged photos and artwork, *The Quantum Revolution* privileges a new way of understanding and seeing politics, society, and culture through the lens of the duality that is the essence of the quantum imaginary.

(Digital Futures)

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ART, TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE

**ARTHUR KROKER
AND DAVID COOK
WITH LYNN BARON**

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To the memory of Marilouise Kroker, Sheila Cook, and Lena Dmytriw (Baron) who, we know for certain, would join us in further dedicating this book to the truly courageous and deeply inspiring struggle of the people of Ukraine.

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***THE QUANTUM
REVOLUTION***

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1. THE QUANTUM REVOLUTION

Riders of the Information Storm

We are swimming in the data stream. Riders of the information storm, images mesmerize us, data defines us, algorithms remember us, speed fascinates us, news bombards us, info wars confuse us, devices connect us, remote amplifies us, isolation saddens us. We are deeply embedded in digital technology, the very first inhabitants of life in the quantum zone.

The quantum revolution? That's everyday life today where technology moves fast, very fast, and where, under cover of the digital devices that connect us, the most sophisticated concepts of technology and science reshape our existence, from mathematics, to biogenetics and, above all, quantum physics where the wave/particle indeterminacy is the creative force that explodes the Newtonian universe both in astrophysics and in the sub-atomic. This revolution – the quantum revolution – has swiftly flooded human consciousness, shaped social behaviour, crafted individual identity. More than we may suspect, contemporary digital experience opens onto a horizon of reality that is strangely new: familiar yet unfamiliar, intimate yet uncanny, sensuous yet cold, tactile yet abstract, technological yet magical – populated by fast vectors, quantum fluctuations, black holes, force fields, gravity waves, algorithms for tracking, archiving, sorting, mapping, in fact, algorithms now for just about everything taking quiet possession of body and mind. We may continue to think and feel by checking the rear-view mirror, but everyone knows that the digital is the future: viral memes going contagious, ramped up economies circulating at high speed, crowdsourced projects, cookies that stick to your digital body like glue, with life, love, anger, loneliness, and desire moving at the speed of the digital stream. The decisive tipping point has been reached, but questions remain:

What big pot of electrified liquid reality have we been tipped into? And are we sufficiently future-immunized?

The young know this instinctively. It's their world, the universe of social media, where nothing is ever stable for long, events appear and then just as quickly vanish, remote intimacy is increasingly the rule, and reality itself puts on the mask of simulation: fragmented, discontinuous, and uncertain. In the world today, reality as we once knew it has effectively disappeared, just vapourized by the dropping of the data bomb – the blast of information technology, leaving us in a world where even the boundaries of social media and mass media have blurred, blending into a new communicative reality with mass media feeding off “breaking news” that is always only a tweet away, and social media energized by media-savvy influencers who add a personal touch to the very traditional business of advertising. Today, it's TikTok for fresh twists on things silly and sublime, Instagram for quick relationship updates, YouTube for drilling down into a beautifully delirious reality of images, spin, soft-skin documentaries, Flickr news, just-to-the-moment cultural shifts in the games of reality, apps for upgrading the mind, how-to online videos for sculpting the body perfect, and Facebook as a memory-machine increasingly reserved for older folks. The quantum zone is the killer app of all killer apps. It's actually murdered reality as we knew it, making the young generation futurists of what's fast approaching and the rest of us passive spectators to something we don't always understand.

Speed is power. Moving at the speed of light, technology now has the power to abolish reality itself, to make the very horizon of life something fluctuating, swirling, drifting, uncertain – moving both electronically at fast-shutter speed but also, at the same instant, deaccelerating like a plunging space capsule with its blazing heat shields about to enter the earth's atmosphere. With events accelerating quickly and gigantic waves of change sweeping suddenly and violently across the social universe, we can finally know what it feels like to be so much background radiation – beautiful, complicated, resplendent cosmic dust – filling the quantum zone.

In fact, what was previously reserved for the language of astrophysics – quantum fluctuations, ghost waves, n-dimensional space/time, blue stragglers, primordial black holes, virtual particles – has now broken out of its previous homeland in scientific discourse, quickly becoming through the language of digital technology the matter of everyday reality, the real world of life in a society stressed out by technological change where familiar landmarks have been blown away like so much obsolete debris in the timeless time and spaceless space that is life in the

quantum zone. Indeed, like the first mammals of flesh, blood, and bone who had the audacity to rebel against their fate as four-limbed earth crawlers, rising to become vertical suns in their own right – always tragic, sometimes bold, walkers of the land and sailors of the seven seas – the new beings of the quantum zone swim in fluctuations, breathe in deeply the air of uncertainty, warm themselves at the fire of swirling digital vortices all around them, and learn to live and thrive in a lonely planet inhabited by unpredictable data drift.

Everything now is quantum, sometimes bending low to the ground in the face of gale force storms of rapid technological change, at other times taking flight like a bird of prey which knows that its very survival depends on moving fast, very fast, in the strange algorithmic winds that surround it. Life in the quantum revolution is like an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction, with every traditional beacon, every customary institution, every fabric of traditional meaning, blasted apart, and then sometimes bound ever more densely together by technologies that quickly, silently insert the most sophisticated concepts of theoretical physics and the most abstract of mathematical visions into the radiating core of social reality. Much more than we may suspect, we are a theory-driven culture, one where sophisticated concepts, from astrophysics, mathematics, genetics, artificial intelligence, and robotic engineering are routinely plugged into human thoughts and feelings by digital devices at the speed of a screen swipe, making us their human, all too human, prosthetics.

The radiating core of quantum culture is speed. Absolute in its relentless velocity, hyper in its acceleration, transformative in its consequential effects, quantum speed has all the power of a sorcerer's magic. In the quantum zone where we now live, things begin to swirl, our minds and bodies most of all, in the solar winds of the data storm. Nothing is spared from the blast. Nothing escapes from being sucked into the digital vortex, seduced by the digital screen, vacuumed dry by waiting web-crawlers, profiled by databases, activities recorded by patient algorithms, with every data search a potential clue to future preferences and every screen gaze an early psychological indicator of a consumer choice yet to come. We don't need to know the intricacies of the uncertainty principle to recognize that we are wave and particle at one and the same time: lives caught up in slow waves of social motion moving from birth to death but accelerating, all the while, as virtual particles at high speed through network society. We most definitely don't have to know anything about the astrophysics of faraway galaxies to know that our very own digital galaxy is populated by powerful force fields, collapsing stars, and black holes absorbing every passing thing

by their force of attraction. And we don't have to be historians to recognize that life today is a vortex, an intensely, immensely magnetic swirling motion that takes everything down to scenes never visited before, emotions never experienced, reactions never felt, events in far distant places never before known. Thrown into the technological vortex by (digital) life moving at the speed of light, we are drowning in information, swallowing big bytes of predigested virtual reality, overwhelmed by compelling events that suddenly appear and then quickly vanish, our attention spans stretched to the point of breaking with the g-forces exerted by fast flows of data, having no easy ways of escape, no sure exits from the data storm.

But there's one thing we do know for sure. Humans climbed the evolutionary ladder from swimming in primordial soup to drifting in the deep space of digital reality by being highly adaptable to changing circumstances. For better or worse, we have always learned to harden our vulnerable bodies and protect our fragile nervous systems within the skin of technology. A visiting anthropologist to the contemporary social scene might well report that we have gone from alphabets chiseled in stone and inscribed on rolls of papyrus to remote communication in relatively short order, that, not content with canoes for river pilgrimages, trains for mobility across the land and telegraphs for dot/dashing the news, we are now about to transcend the species barrier, effectively shedding human skin in favour of fast mental, visual, and tactile travel through the digital imaginary. Our far distant ancestors may have had wilderness for minds in primitive times; our near distant foremothers and forefathers may have grown mechanical minds for mechanical times; but we know, for a certainty, that our very survival depends on learning to swim in the mind electronic for this time of all electrified times.

Fortunately, there's a quick and easy way of doing exactly that. Just follow the youngest of the younger generation. For all their generational despair and anxiety, they are our beautiful successors – the very first members of the quantum generation – who have already reshaped the human cranium into the mind electronic. Their tutors are close at hand: YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, Twitter, TikTok. Their rate of information absorption is phenomenal, particularly since their very (social) survival often depends on it. Their rate of response is quick-time, since their minds have already click-baited their way beyond mechanical drudgery to the fluidity of the digital way. Their depth of understanding is remarkable, probably because they have learned, and learned well, how to circulate in the mind electronic with eyes wide open to natural and human-made catastrophes coming their way: climate change, political

turbulence, economic crisis, social injustice. And, best of all, they are the very first of all the *blended* minds to come. Not blended in facile ways, but blended in very meaningful, complicated trajectories: young minds flowing free, easy, and respectful with all creative variations possible of gender blending, racial blending, ethnic blending, futures blending. This is one rising generation that is already, at a remarkably young age, fully mature in their knowledge base. Definitely an estimable generation who have not only a lot to teach the so-called adult world about opening its (closed) eyes of denial to major crises close at hand, but who already seem to be attuned to the perils and possibilities of the mind electronic than older generations who are, as usual, late to the feast. Not really proverbial canaries in the mine shaft giving early warnings about low lying poison in the air, the youngest of the young generation are (our) successors with futurist visions who have actually learned to sing a new song of survival for troubled times. And that song – the song of quick perception, depth immersion, sensitive feelings, blended minds, highly adaptable manoeuvring, disbelief over markers of racialization, gender difference, sexual difference, openness to diversity – is a brilliant guide to the future electronic for us all, as clinically chilling in its realism as it is hopeful in its ethical aspirations.

But as with all things realistic, the youngest of the young digital generation may see things clearly now, but they are limited in what they can do about it. They are young, precarious, generationally powerless at this point, with all the usual restrictions of the young – having knowledge of much but limited means of redress: no money, no control, not sufficiently appreciated for their creative insights. Young, resilient, curious, and filled with a sense of adventure, they are born staring straight up into a future dark. All that calamitous future of climate change not addressed, massive fiscal debts unchecked, remote jobs already vulnerable, fickle friendships at a distance, love in a time of gender bending and sexual fluidity, oppressive surveillance carried out by dominant institutions, social and economic inequities, society bitterly divided by race, class, gender, sexual preference – that future will soon be their very present life circumstance. The quantum generation has only a very few years to get up to speed: to learn the ways of life abruptly upended by social media; to adapt themselves to entirely new frontiers of work, friendship, and play; to issue clear warnings about social and environmental crises by protests, petitions, organizing online and in the streets; to figure out in advance how to possibly have meaningful lives in a society that thrives on waste, energizes itself by meaninglessness, and whose politics function by setting groups against each other in anger. They must learn

how to fashion free, authentic personal identities in a society that specializes in the retreat into private fantasies on the one hand or mesmerized passivity by charismatic political leaders preaching hatred or so-called corporate innovators playing the Pied Piper on their way to the death of the social on the other. The new quantum generation represents rising life quickly coming to maturity in a time of declining life, dreamers of new organic solidarities in a politics increasingly characterized by angry backlash against racial and ethnic minorities, finite beings of absolute worth in a society seemingly bent on collective suicide: not heightened reciprocity with the world, but tightened border security; not equalitarianism, but the triumph of class differentials; not social solidarity, but the displacement of anger and fear onto the disadvantaged; not shared cultural responsibility for the future, but predatory politics which mortgage the future and plunder the present. The young today are often helpless witnesses to a cynical politics of endless deferral, with its displacement to *their* future of massive public indebtedness, with climate crises not addressed and racial conflicts not reconciled as their effective inheritance, with violent responses by police forces to their awesomely courageous politics of street protests. Born under the sign of what Nietzsche warned against – “let the dead bury the living” – the new generation, for all its incipient hopefulness, idealism, and creativity, will surely reap the bitter fruit of the death of the social. The real irony is that while the rising generation of the young have always known private individualism – connected yet isolated – as their digital birthright, their very survival in the future will be dependent upon their taking public action, providing creative leadership for a society adrift politically. Entertained, yet at the same time effectively isolated, by major technological platforms, growing up in homes which, if middle class, often focus on exclusively private interests – honing competitive skills in sports and career planning, enjoying an undisturbed life of consumerism – and, if working class, experiencing all the stress and anxiety of downward social mobility, the young today have been shadowed by their parents’ illusion that it is possible to separate public and private life. With a future whirlwind of precarious labour, radical climate change, hypercompetition for scarce resources, clashing politics in the streets, and nomadic flows of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers seeking admission to bunkered societies of privilege, the public dimension of life is about to impress itself urgently on private experience.

We are not operating under any romantic illusions. We know that in every generation, the traditional, mechanical, and electronic always

repeat the same mythic story. It is no sooner born and rushing into life with wild energy than it splits like an atom getting ready for fission, with the young taking different sides of the story, often exercising a hangman's judgment not tempered by nuance and impartiality, furiously hopeful and then despondently melancholic. Indeed, as we think back, there are television images of street battles in Portland, Oregon where Black Lives Matter protesters are taunted, tear-gassed, and sometimes paintballed by equally young, far-right white supremacists riding their flag-draped pickup trucks right through the nightly struggle zone downtown. *Alternative realities*. Demands for social justice on the one hand, and Q-Anon and Proud Boys with their conspiratorial theories about networks of liberal paedophiles in control on the other. All the while, political leaders of right wing populism bray loudly in the background, chanting something about "great patriots," but always standing safely to the side, egging things on, notable mostly for the loudness of their contempt. But it's not just in the United States but in Canada as well, where television, radio and social media report unfolding events at Fairy Creek, BC. More than one thousand environmental protesters of all ages have been arrested, often violently, by the RCMP operating at the behest of the provincial government and private logging interests, all intent on clear-cutting one of the last standing preserves of ancient trees on the West Coast. These life-sustaining trees, some three thousand years old, now depend for their very survival on courageous individuals putting their bodies into harm's way as barriers between aggressive chainsaws and the solitude of the ancient forest. Or consider the continuing tragedy of all those unmarked graves of murdered and missing Indigenous children in all those residential schools matched by the heightened cynicism of federal and provincial governments which do virtue signalling by (media) day, but when no one is watching, hurry to court to press juridical blockages against any substantive changes to white settler colonialism. Cynical times cut with a lot of bad faith, but always smoothed over with pious public rhetoric by leaders seemingly without an ethical compass, and followers with, too often, the malice of anger in their heart of hearts.

Theses on the Quantum Revolution

It is most definitely a strange historical epoch, one eerily marked by viral contagion and pandemic fever with the rising spectre of variants. Bodies exposed, vulnerable, precarious. The most minimal social

contact a possible point of the most dangerous infection. Locked down society, locked up emotions. And now suddenly, we find ourselves in the giddiness of a postpandemic culture propelled by the media hype of public officials anxious to return social life to the business of the pre-pandemic “normal,” and accelerated by a growing public mood that mirrors what Greek historian Thucydides once said about survivors of the Athenian plague in classical times, namely that they were euphoric in the streets, convinced that they would never die of *any* cause.¹ The contemporary population grows comfortable with the new gods of Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca, convinced that pandemic fever is already an afterthought, so why not let the games roll on for the fully vaccinated with life outside the bubble, and let the ICUs be reserved for that new biological marker of difference, the unvaccinated? The sky of the future opens with a dark dawn but hope is always resurgent for sunshine sparkle. Where did the soul go to die?

Confusion rising. Uncertainty everywhere. Anxiety streaming. And why not? Plague times, euphoria of the postpandemic, cryptocurrencies, cancel culture, AI, deep machine learning, automation, populist movements, many conservative, some progressive, politics of the streets, violence from the air. And all of this circulated and reported by social media at the speed of breaking news, with rhythms electronic moving faster than the rising of the sun and the setting of the day.

A quantum event, the viral pandemic had, and probably still has, the temperament of an ill wind: a powerful vortex, global in scope, fast-moving, circulating freely, endlessly mutating; locking down entire populations, shutting down economies, paralyzing governments; generating anxiety, depression, and fear in its wake; provoking public health measures and widespread political backlash in turn; making many societies hostile battlegrounds of the masked and unmasked, the vaccine-proofed and the unvaccinated. And all this set off by a virus which has virtually no mass, only spin, no solid state, only a rising rate of infections, an organic nanoparticle accelerating at the speed of the perfect parasite: attaching itself to a host cell, quickly colonizing it to generate thousands of copies of its own RNA while, at the same time, forbidding infected cells from sending out panic warnings to the host body. Literally, a quantum event where what counts is the spectre of the invisible – the nanoparticle that is SARS-CoV-2 – a pathogen which rises

1 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Benjamin Jowett, 2.49–53, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0105%3Abook%3D2%3Achapter%3D49>.

quickly into public visibility as the viral pandemic that now has the entire world in its grasp. And not just that, but no sooner do vaccines appear on the scene than the pathogen changes course, adapts quickly, mutates into different variants, many of which are more deadly than the original virus. Pathogens with a murderous instinct.

So then, five (political) theses on the viral future that is life today in the quantum zone:

Quantum Leap: In the beginning there was the sun. Life only works with hydrogen atoms of the sun fusing into helium and setting off the solar wind. A wind that, as all quantum fields do, mutates on its path through the space/time continuum. Neutrinos, by the billions, quickly changing colours, passing through all things, never bothering to pause, certainly never to stop: for neutrinos, the rest position is death. Somewhere along the way, unpredictable, with a probability infinitesimally small and would be zero except it happened, the cosmic soup comes about. It is the very same with the viral world. Untold billions inhabit the world, yet at any given time the probability of viruses raising their existence from near zero is unknowable and improbable. So, it is that quantum mutability leaps with a form of action at a distance that invades the next species categories of animals that we are. More than we may suspect, we are in the grip of viral fate – unpredictable in its direction, untraceable in its origins – as indifferent to its consequences as it is spectacularly creative in its mutations. The viral singularity has arrived.

Geo-Viral Politics: What's more exciting than to have a new agent in town? Yes, an exciting ersatz Bond movie for virus times where good wins over evil and the British Empire lives on – grace of AstraZeneca that mutates good and evil into the Geo-Viral flow. Yet, the new (viral) kid on the block is a master in stealth. Everyone looks alike, everyone could be the agent, and even the agents don't know they are agents – all are undercover. For the virus does not announce its presence but carries on unbeknownst to the carrier. Radiating viral particles into the social field and then moving on. A forever game of who is responsible lost in the nonlinear dynamics of the swarm. So, was it the Chinese with their Belt and Road as a vector for dispersal, or the American global economy, or the neighbour next door? Geopolitics and now Geo-Viral politics in nobody's service?

Vaccine Passports: The plague hit Cadiz in the seventeenth century and received an artistic revival when Albert Camus wrote his *The State*

of Siege. Lockdowns naturally followed with arbitrary deaths as the plague took over the city. All too familiar. Familiar, as well, is the control function of a certificate of health necessary to prove one's right to existence. Naturally, you cannot get a certificate of health if you cannot prove you exist in the first instance. So, another version of how to exclude the marginalized, whether by race, gender, class, ethnicity, or, for Camus, those who try to rebel. Maybe coming to a state near you as well. Vaccine passports, then, as the opening gambit in a future of biopolitics in which the truth of the body will be either certified by public health officials or, left uncertified, the body will be strictly limited in its opportunities: for mobility, jobs, education, medicine. Not a new class divide, but a viral divide that wagers the truth of the body on its certificate of vaccination, on its certificate of those raised into the visibility of mobility and those falling back into the invisibility and immobility of the newly uncertified whose contagion sends them and others to a quick death.

Viral Code: At the beginning was the digital revolution skinning the world with information processing. Then the AI world itself comingles with the biological ushering in CRISPR and with that, the brave new world of bioengineering body designs fit for fast travel in the wired future. And then arrives SARS-Cov-2 with a sequencing designed to escape the immune system – as we all know. And equally, we know that the vaccines arrived and have reprogrammed the immune system to counter the viral code. Welcome then to the dynamic of messenger RNA. And with it the war between the viruses and the vaccines. The virus which continuously modulates its script, its message, and the vaccines that counter with their own RNA, all aimed at a war of annihilation. This is the world of particle and antiparticle that plays out in a test of mortality. Each ribosome a site of complexity where the messenger strings compete. An information struggle at the heart of survival not of the fittest so much as those that are retrofitted with the latest system wetware.

Event Horizon: And, just maybe, then, it was all over. Not with a bang, not a supernova declaring victory over the virus but with implosion – sending us all back to the genetic soup. Thus, it just stops, suddenly disappears, collapsing under the reversal of the virus into an antiviral of which all events in the quantum world are always capable. Everything now is wave and particle, and both at the same time. Everything is appearance on its way to disappearance. Nothing hangs in the balance. And why? Because in the quantum world of pandemic fever, there is no balance, only complex entanglements. We are entangled in a field

of everything – generating energy, movement, velocity, ambiguity, and complexity. Energy that generates intense social frictions. Movement that rushes headlong into the site of disappearance in the quantum culture's black hole. We are left with periodic bouts of radiation – just like the Black Death leaving us with a dwarf planet but with the memory file living on. And, just maybe, the black hole rests awaiting another time when the quantum leap from species to species appears again to the unsuspecting planet.

Art as Quantum Gateway

Life in the quantum zone? That is life today, where the body is left fully exposed to the invasion of the *digital* pandemic: devices strapped to skin, apps framing minds, data circulating like the cold blood of the social, AI rising to emergent consciousness, deep machine learning archiving the remains of the social, digital connectivity substituting for affinity, streaming the new horizon of the human imagination, blended reality the breaking dawn. A quantum zone where only opposites are true, contradictions the rule, entanglement the usual state of things, exponential change the accelerant, with the properties of the subatomic – spin, velocity, vectors, stickiness – breaking beyond the language of scientific discourse to become the everyday vernacular of the new reality-machine.

Stripped of traditional boundaries, finding ourselves in unfamiliar technological territory, caught between the delirium of pandemic fever on the one hand and the intensified pressure of digital modification of the human nervous system on the other, we are in desperate need of the artistic imagination as a way of learning new perspectives for travelling within the kinetic energy of the quantum zone. Now as ever, artistic imagination is the futurist of the future, certain prophet of uncertain times, diagnostician of the alphabet of life in the quantum zone, a way of seeing that is always itself like a beautiful wave/particle duality, simultaneously exploring the wave aesthetics of the future while intensely experiencing the blast of particles that radiates from the present. Art, then, as the gateway to the quantum zone.

Rebecca Belmore and the Art of Duality

For example, there is probably no better revelation of the wave/particle duality that is the essence of life in the quantum zone today



Figure 1. Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2008. National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy of the artist.

than the artistic imagination of Rebecca Belmore, a contemporary Indigenous artist. She explores the *inner reversibility* present in all experience, namely that everything now is wave and particle – discrete event and cultural pattern – at one and the same time, that events in everyday life when closely examined reveal the greater dimensions of the whole just as much as larger patterns of life in the quantum zone are made up of blasts of particular events. Belmore's artistic productions, including such evocative creations as *Fringe* and *Wave Sound* among others simultaneously capture in the poetics of their imagery all the melancholia and anguish associated with cruel events and subjugated Indigenous bodies while, at the same time, evoking a resurgent will intent on disrupting patterns of colonial logic – creating new ways of listening, seeing, and feeling as aesthetic waves of the future.

For example, *Fringe* mimics classical portraits of a woman's reclining body: almost nude, draped with a white sheet, carefully posed, a languid bodily object framed by a blank background. However, in a decisive break with the logic of classic representation which would reduce the reclining female figure to the object of the (male) gaze, *Fringe* does an instant aesthetic reversal, drawing the unsuspecting eye to the raw suture in the woman's back fringed by trails of blood. Here, the aesthetics of the classical gaze is disrupted by the painful reality of the colonial wound, the languid reclining figure by the fringe of blood trails dripping across the classical pose. Based on an actual medical experience where an unsuspecting Indigenous woman had two glass beads installed as part of her suture by a surgeon in Winnipeg, Manitoba for the greater amusement of other doctors and nurses, the painting burns the colonialism of white contempt into the woman's back. In the most vicious way, her body is made an object of the colonial gaze, this time

by surgeons and medical staff attending the wounds of an Indigenous woman on the Canadian Prairies, and, while they are it, suturing abuse value in the form of mocking (Indigenous) beads into her wounded skin – the contempt of (colonial) “jokes” definitely indicative of a larger pattern of Indigenous abuse. Not content with simply registering in the stark aesthetic relief of her artwork the literal reality of the colonial wound as it cuts up, reworks, and mocks Indigenous skin, *Fringe* also does something else entirely. It instantly reverses mimicry into resurgence, the wounded body into a rising sign of Indigenous vision. Like all of life itself, material events often work to escape the confining particulars of their interpretation, by disclosing different levels of hidden meanings – signs reversing, almost magically, into countersigns, painful wounds into moments of recovery and recuperation. So it is with *Fringe* where the long, diagonal suture and its dangling trails of blood are represented as beaded fringes on an Indigenous woman’s reclining body, this time not posed for colonial observation, but as a visual reminder of other bodies, other Indigenous women’s experience – the beads not as objects of contemptuous medical procedures, but as a truly beautiful aesthetic reflective of deeper Indigenous memories of dangling rows of beads, skilfully decorated bodies, rising moods of collective harmony, healing, and bodily solidarity.

It is the very same with Belmore’s performance artwork, *1181*, where the artist slowly, patiently, methodically hammered 1181 nails into a log as part of a performance mourning the death of one thousand, one hundred, and eighty-one murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada. Each hammered nail, each lamentation for a missing Indigenous woman, was accompanied by Belmore’s voice howling screams of pain and sorrow. In this performance what’s at stake is the warring duality of violence and remembrance, with the sounds of the hammer and the sounds of sorrow evoking individual memories of the violent deaths of 1181 Indigenous women while the physical duration of the event brought to the surface of emotional visibility time passing without justice, time passing without any (official) response to serial murder on a mass scale. Or, with the same powerful poetic imagination, the artwork *Black Cloud* by Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Year which commemorated the death of the Indigenous teenager Neil Stonechild, who

was last seen alive in police custody
 under the influence
 found five days later frozen to death in a field
 wearing one shoe

marks on his body likely cause by handcuffs
 aboriginal teenage boy
 dropped off and walking to where?²

In this stark image of death and desolation, charred wood and nails are mirrored against a snowy white background. No possibility of reprieve here, definitely no escape, just a hard image of burnt wood studded with nails as a visual reminder of murder in the cold prairie snow, another Indigenous victim of what police on the Canadian Prairies like to call “starlight tours” – the police practice of dropping off Indigenous people in custody in the freezing cold and darkness of night of winter, far from the shelter of the city, close to death in the wilderness, abandoned, vulnerable, abused. In all of Belmore’s intensely and uniquely visceral art – *The Named and the Unnamed*, *Blood on the Snow*, *Sister*, *State of Grace*, *To Rest and to Dream*, *Fountain* – the emotional vocabulary of human abjection is transformed from the desolate landscapes of forgotten crimes against Indigenous bodies into shamanistic practices of remembrance and renewal. Remembrance because this is one expression of Indigenous aesthetic practice which embodies in its gestures, performance, and sounds memories of bitter injustice, dreams of broken bodies, and performances of the calligraphy of abuse. But also renewal because this always so immensely visceral evocation of the terrorism of abuse against Indigenous bodies and spirits is also a profound assertion of the Indigenous will to survive, resist, and transform. By making visible that which has been repressed, by making legible that which has been silenced, Belmore’s art traces a trajectory of hope across the gathering darkness. More than is customary, her artistic imagination focuses on the brutal particulars of Indigenous subjugation – murdered women, abused children, disposable teenage boys, everywhere “blood in the snow,” a catalogue of “the named and the unnamed,” always intensifying the performance of the particulars with such maximal intensity that fragmentary stories of suffering, pain, and abuse begin to reveal their secrets, making visible and rendering responsible to moral conscience that which had been previously consigned to the silence of obscurity, to the invisibility of neglect.

The duality of Belmore’s art, that it is both remembrance of monstrous deeds and resurgence of Indigenous resistance, is nowhere more

2 Rebecca Belmore and Osvaldo Yero, “In Memory of Neil Stonechild (1973–1990),” in *Facing the Monumental*, Rebecca Belmore, ed. Wanda Nanibush (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario), 36.

present than in her artwork, *Wave Sound*. Consisting of four separate large-scale sculpted cones situated in wilderness locations across Canada, isolated in national parks from Newfoundland to British Columbia, *Wave Sound* has duality as its central aesthetic purpose. Each horn is carefully sculpted from materials particular to its specific location.

As Kathleen Ritter, curator of *LandMarks 2017*, eloquently describes it:

It was near solstice and the sun took its time to set. I was sitting on an outcropping of mottled granite on the north shore of Chigaam (Lake Superior) that dropped off dramatically into water below. Next to me was Rebecca Belmore's *Wave Sound*, one of a series of sculptures sited across the land. Each sculpture was unique, cast in aluminum and textured with the impression of different rock surfaces nearby. Here in Pukaskwa National Park, *Wave Sound* was made with an imprint of a glacial crevice found in the shore trail along Mdaabii Miikna ("go to the shore trail" in Anishinaabemowin). In Banff National Park, the surface of *Wave Sound* captured the angular shale of the surrounding mountains, and was placed on the shoreline of Lake Minnewanka. In Gros Morne National Park, *Wave Sound* was poised on the seaside cliffs of Green Point, a geological benchmark of the ocean 500 million years ago. The final version of *Wave Sound* was made of copper, and taken to Chimnissing, home to the Beaufort First Nation, where we spent the day placing it along the beach and listening.³

Wave Sound perfectly captures the mathematics of wave functions which, at their base, work in the fourfold language of intensity: amplitude, frequency, period, and speed. In this artwork, it is amplitude at its very best, not this time though in the hygienic language of mathematical formulations, but in a way that honours the deep materiality meaning of amplitude. In this case, *Wave Sound* perfectly captures the sound geography of vibrations from many different positions of equilibrium: the sounds of waves crashing into the shoreline of Chigaam, the sound of the North Atlantic in Newfoundland, the slow oscillations and equally slow time of glaciers, waves on a beach in the Beaufort First Nation. Here, the cones are ways of listening to the constant vibrations and oscillations of earth, air, fire, and water. Finally, an artwork that privileges the natural power of wave functions, the fact that while we are ceaselessly enveloped by the sounds of the universe, we are usually tuned in only to the hyperfrequencies of the technological. *Wave*

3 Kathleen Ritter, *LandMarks2017* curator, in *Facing the Monumental*, Rebecca Belmore, ed. Wanda Nanibush (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario), 84.

Sound works to correct that auditory, or perhaps ethical, imbalance by sculpturing its way to a different sound track, one that vibrates to the elemental sounds of the sky, waves, earth, and fire. But it is also more than that as it emits the vibrations of Belmore herself. In the quantum world the intensities are reversible, both sending and receiving. That is, in fact, what makes *Wave Sound* so intense in its sculptural quietness, so disruptive in its change of frequencies. In the world conjured by *Wave Sound*, earth spins, the night-time sky speaks, winds flow, air has velocity, intensities appear and disappear, life itself runs up and down the scale of frequencies, the fires of the sun flare outward ceaselessly, listening is a way of finally learning how to speak to earth in all of its dense materiality, and everywhere there is only one clear signal to be heard – the sound of vibrations in all their oscillating amplitude, frequency, and intensity.

Quantum Vision

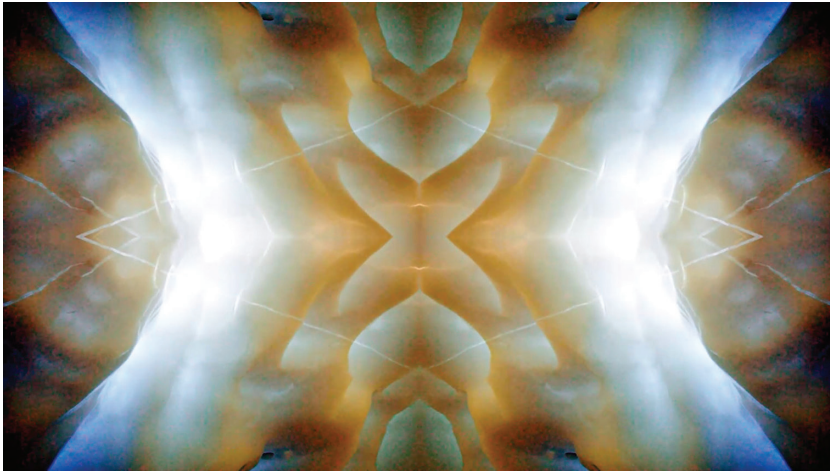


Figure 2. nichola feldman-kiss,⁴ *Study for Siren III*, Indefinite Video Loop, 2011.
© nichola feldman-kiss. Copyright Visual Arts-CARCC, 2022

4 nichola feldman-kiss, *planet species animal human water Agent. in motion on the move in flight of the Earth of the Land of the Ocean her ecology. here and there sea and ice wind and current seed and settlement (Study for Siren III)*, 2021, Indefinite video loop.

Thinking at the Speed of Particles and Waves

That is the starting point for *The Quantum Revolution*, a form of critical reflection on contemporary society that runs parallel to the artistic imagination. Art is not viewed as a fateful talisman of future changes in technological society, but as the future already worked out in detail and definition. In the same way that important artists such as Rebecca Belmore have powerfully captured tangible dualities present in all of life today, so too *The Quantum Revolution* privileges a new way of understanding – a way of seeing politics, society, and culture through the lens of the wave/particle duality that is the essence of the quantum imaginary.

Here, thought moves at the speed of particles and waves simultaneously, immersing itself at first in discrete events making up the alphabet of the quantum dimension, our *Particle Poetics: Street Scenes from the Quantum Revolution*: lonesome cowboys to the stars, gateways to blue stragglers, Indigenous art on plywood surrounding empty industrial land, astronomy discoveries, political insurrections, social movements, prison chronicles, stories of algorithms, gravitational waves, primordial black holes, jet streams of gravity waves, streaming superstring, interference patterns, hybrid bodies, and trouble in the global village. All these are temporary stops on the pilgrim's way that is the alphabet of the quantum zone. Like life itself with its turbulent flow of events, any particle of experience, selected carefully in advance or stumbled upon by random accident, is a potential pathway to a deeper understanding of the twenty-first century experience, with its dense entanglements, confused boundaries, escape velocity, ceaseless superposition of circulating media images, private dreams, powerful flows of psychic forces, insurgent politics, and rise and fall of empires. Refusing hierarchical distinctions between officially sanctioned art and street art, the alphabet of the quantum zone that is *Particle Poetics* and *Wave Aesthetics* is agnostic on the choice of art discussed. In fact, *Particle Poetics* begins with three very different artistic productions: graffiti art on abandoned warehouse walls; murals portraying resurgence and desolation situated in a decaying industrial recycling urban zone; and beautifully cast bronze hands holding binoculars, bowls, teacups, books, and hope all quietly tucked away in obscure corners close to the Pacific Ocean, just waiting to come alive again and again with the attentive glance of a passerby. And then, of course, there are those brilliant paintings by young Indigenous artists pointing out pathways to a human future that will either be Indigenous or it will probably not be at all; paintings on plywood planks on a busy highway, without official honour, without safe shelter in an art museum but, for all that, they have about them the tremendous energy of hope,

the instant spiritual uplift of Indigenous cosmology just breaking right through the heavy inertial weight of a society that carries within its most dynamic elements the tangible scent of death. But not just street art, although *Particle Poetics* honours art of the streets as the privileged site of prophecy, vision, and despair, but also art, particularly body art by a fabled trajectory of women artists, that may sometimes be honoured by museum exhibitions, but in its visceral aesthetics and transgressive perspectives has messages to send and lessons to teach that are written on the texts of bodies – bodies leaking, bleeding, menstruating, desiring, tightly enclosed, on the jagged edge, bodies of puss, shit, and urine but also bodies imploding with happiness, regrets, worries, dreamy dreams, sighing, longing their way right on through the stuff of everyday life. To travel in the artistic imaginations of Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Rebecca Horn, and nichola feldman-kiss is to finally know something about bodies lit up by the speed of the vortex but also something even more interesting about all those dangling bodies and faded lives in the dark shadowland outside the exploding centre of things. No matter the particular expression of the artworks, whether sprayed on a warehouse wall, carved into granite on a lonely seashore, displayed in a street gallery's photo exhibition and just pushing its way through to the fourth dimension, or exemplified by the kinetic art of Bourgeois, Smith, Horn, and feldman-kiss, the emphasis is on artistic vision.

Energetic Art

And why not? All the rules of the social game today might be still trapped in Euclidean space with its terminal division of space and time, hierarchical divisions, carefully demarcated boundaries, action at a distance, definite beginnings and clear-cut endings, but the impact of digital technology has been to implode twenty-first century experience into the quantum zone with its parallel universes, complex entanglements, energetic matter, wave motions, particle flows, qubits with life itself at the speed of AI, deep machine learning, and all the rest.⁵ Our

5 For an interesting discussion of entanglement with respect to theoretical physics and, specifically, with regard to Niels Bohr's theory of complementarity versus Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, see Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Half-way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). While Barad explores "agential realism" as reflective of the entanglement of matter and meaning, our sense of entanglement with its focus on particles and waves in art, matter, motion, and politics is far closer to Nietzsche's

(institutional) feet might be still stuck in a society modelled on a now obsolescent interpretation of time and space, but our (digital) eyes have been blasted wide open by the immense power – psychic, political, economic, cultural – of life in the wires. For better or worse, we are fated to be travellers in the quantum zone with no easy exits and events always on the boil. The real game-changer is the battle for control of perspective, and that battle fought between digital reality and the digital imagination. More than we may care to admit, we live in parallel universes all the time with everyday life cut and spliced by larger global narratives, sometimes political or financial, but usually the fantasies of shared entertainment culture that has us in its collective thrall with Netflix the new night sky. And our perspective knows all about waves, since we have long ago learned to be hyperattuned to the smallest shift in the celebrity vibrations of the media universe – the rise and fall of fame signalled by Instagrams flush with excited gossip, swirling rumours, and just so delicious accusations, weeping apologies, and sudden banning. For us, superstring theory is not really a matter of complex mathematics, but the essence of life today with the connected universe that is digital reality just jackhammer alive with data vibrations and code oscillations. And all those vibrations and oscillations don't stop at the doorway of the programmer's shack, but thanks to the seduction of social media vibrate all those complex algorithms with their rezz flesh, spinning bodies, jump-cut perspective, quick-time mergers of space/time, right into the deepest recesses of digital perspective, literally fitting our eyes with quantum glasses. We know all about energetic matter because we are tethered to energetic technology. Its digital devices jangle with high-speed energy; the design of screen culture profoundly shapes human perspective; popular apps facilitate our every want, soothe anxiety, oscillate moods, map addictions to daily news feeds. Today, we are literally (data) particles in the flow riding the momentum of larger digital waves, sometimes crashing in the storm, stranded in pools of inertia, or taking a chance on new gateways to the digital future – cryptocurrencies, bitcoins, virtual wallets.

Energetic technology is paralleled by equally energetic art. Digital technology might deliver us to the particle matter and wave motions of quantum society, but energetic art provides a vocabulary, first for understanding what is happening to us as we are saturated with flows of code drift and then, for not only surviving the data storm but actually

perspective on the liquid flows of the world of "appearances." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

thriving right through to the other side. And energetic art can do this because art is always light years ahead of technology in understanding new gateways to human perception. Playing with perspective, old and new, is, in fact, what art does and, most definitely, does best. It blends time and space into beautiful flows of the fabric of space/time. It merges bodies, psyches, and their physical surroundings into often deeply inspiring depictions of the human predicament. It gambles with form, experiments with colour, transforms the simple act of drawing a line on a page into the beginning of an adventure in new ways of seeing. Energetic art is a past master of spatial illusion, easily shifting flat-line perspective into images of three-dimensional space catching the virtual n-dimensional. It's the very same with time, where artistic productions – carving, painting, sculpture, photography – are no respecters of the prison house of fixed time. In art, it's not only that time flows, but that like space itself it sometimes shifts sideways, pushes instantly into the past or dazzles its way into time future. And it often does this by seducing perspective with visual tricks of memory, transforming a carving on a rock into a love story, a faded piece of graffiti on a subway wall into a memorial for the future, a sculpture of a metallic spider into memories of a mother lost, a crawling woman's body into a figure of abjection, a cast bronze hand into a memory of what once was, an image of drowning into transcendence towards a greater sunshine. Entanglement is the story of art; tracing the flows of life its *métier*; discovering in every particle of experience a possible poetics of the human imagination its constant inspiration; transforming found materials into sparks of creativity its necessary practice; and imploding new pathways of perception its continuing project.

Particle Poetics

Particle Poetics tells the story of energetic art, focusing first on striking expression of the artistic imagination, but then lighting up the universe with the spark of new perspectives. In this case, astronomical reports of gravity waves provide a new way of understanding the amplitude and intensity of digital society. Bioengineering new species of hybrid fish generates images of hybrid bodies with their fabricated organs, manufactured DNA, and short life spans. Here, stories about ancient star formations known as *blue stragglers* are rewritten in the poetic intonations of deep space, with its familiar cosmology of life and death. The spark of electricity generates a networked global culture trying survive, if not flourish, at the (digital) velocity of speedrunners, just as much as

technological society is entangled with the birth pangs of baby algorithms, the anger of nostalgia for nostalgia, frenzies of screen addiction, and quantum bodies all moving to the speed of "Vector Zero Vector." From stories about "The Last Human Being," "Macrobusts and Sun Dogs in the Gathering Sky of Global Politics," "Zoom Kids," and "Undone by Screen Addiction" to "Scorpio Rising" and "Primordial Black Holes," the emerging narrative of life in the quantum zone is told in all its intensity and diversity. While these are definitely street scenes from the quantum zone, each story is also in the way of all artistic creativity, namely poetic reflections cut to the speed and slowness of the quantum zone with each story deciphering the meaning of signs flowing from data particles that surround us and, in fact, already inhabit our deepest identities. And, as with all things ancient suddenly made new again, *Particle Poetics*, this alphabet of the quantum zone, no sooner focuses on diverse events in technological society than familiar themes begin to surface: cosmological flows of time passing by the intergalactic stars as well as in the rhythm of life; anticipatory hints of trouble in the global village that have all to do with angst, anxiety, and rage; mythologies of love gained, spurned and, sometimes, lost engraved in granite boulders under the sign of Scorpio Rising, retold by the nightly passage of stars, or fading away on tagged walls unnoticed; or dreams of technological perfectibility crushed by the ecstasy of catastrophe. There are many street scenes in the quantum zone, beautifully entangled, shape-shifters of space/time, intense sites where seemingly the whole history of the universe just begs to finally speak. *Particle Poetics* is only the beginning of what will undoubtedly become an expanding alphabet for growing up quantum.

What of Albert Camus's warnings about the absurd, namely that while we are destined as individuals taking part in the pilgrimage of life to seek meaning in all things, far away as well as close at hand, the universe answers only with silence, frustrating our search for certainty, stubbornly refusing to satisfactorily respond to questions concerning possible meanings and fatal significance? In response, *Particle Poetics* has its own version of the absurd, this time crafted in language of the quantum zone itself. Against expectations, the universe sometimes does break its silence by sending cosmic messengers in the form of blue stragglers, gravity waves, and the ancient signs of the zodiac. The art of reading signs in the cosmic play of the four elements of earth, air, water, and fire surfaces once more; cosmology returns to life again; just as much as magic is to be found in the meeting of ancient mythology and futurist algorithms. Mindful of Camus's admonition concerning absurd experience – the meeting of the insistent human demand for meaning and

the answering silence of the universe, *Particle Poetics* brings the artistic imagination to bear on the question of absurdity itself, on existential questions posed by life in the quantum zone. Here, street scenes from the quantum zone walk the jagged edges between meaning and silence, taking the absurd not as an end point, but as evidence of the human will to survive, create, and flourish in the midst of implacable odds. That's the real meaning of life in the streets of quantum city, living with contradictions, discontinuity, fragments of an always disappearing whole, but for all that intensifying vision, bringing the invisible to the surface of visibility, making legible that which is prohibited and excluded. And all this at the speed of growing contradictions: a quantum zone that is intensely entangled, yet radically disconnected; deeply connected, yet lonely in its affect; accelerated by spin, but without sustaining narratives; moving at escape velocity, but with the palpable inertia of a null void at its disappearing centre; the stronger the technological exteriorization of consciousness, the more intense populist spasms of psychic rage; the more object-like the self becomes as data trash floating in the stream, the deeper the existential crisis of the subjective self. High technology, low mindfulness.

Wave Aesthetics

That is precisely what makes *Wave Aesthetics* so compelling. Turning away from the flow of discrete events, objects, and art that comprise street scenes of the quantum zone, *Wave Aesthetics* focuses on the larger patterns and core logic driving quantum culture. Its method is direct, focused on the storm that forms whenever art meets theory, when, that is, the artistic imagination is summoned by reflective thought to deliver its reasons. The artistic imagination always bristles in the presence of theoretical discourse. As well it should. Creative expressions of the artistic imagination cannot easily be explained on the dissection table of words. Many forms of the visual imagination would lose their essential enigma, the irreducibility of art as the liminal in-between, if reduced to the idiomatic formulations of writing. For that reason, when art meets theory warring aesthetics converge, art sparks fly, differences of kind flare, but, over and beyond that, wild energy definitely happens, wild energy that just flows straight out of the friction of words and images, and all that is enigmatic, mysterious, and boundary breaking in the artistic imagination suddenly finds itself unmoored, untethered, finally free to express itself fully and intensely in the nowhere zone that is creative art at the intersection of

critical reflection. That is precisely what happens in *Wave Aesthetics*. Neither pure art nor undiluted theory, *Wave Aesthetics* is what happens when the artistic and writerly imagination suddenly collide with all the violent energy of converging jet streams, resulting in something *both* intensely artistic and eloquently theoretical – an entirely new way of understanding the primacy of waves in the quantum zone. Here, in the interests of better understanding the amplitude and frequency of waves in quantum culture – waves with all their spin, escape velocity, and sudden changes of state – mixing art and theory under high pressure and then carefully interpreting the difference produces something profoundly original in the fabric of space/time: a series of *aesthetic folds* – wrinkles, bends, warps, and distortion. In effect, *Wave Aesthetics* forces the quantum zone to deliver its reasons, to reveal waves as the energy operators of contemporary life in the quantum zone.

In the light blast that was the beginning, there are only waves, fluid fields where mass and energy change state at random, and out of which all life emerged, including ourselves. Mathematicians know this best. Modern day shamans studying the secrets and riddles of the physical universe, they inscribe wave fields in their books of esoteric knowledge as equations expressing the probability of finding wave/particles, depending on the usual uncertainties: spin, time, momentum, position. Here, everything is virtual; everything is fluid; everything is a matter of probability having everything do with the amplitude and frequency of the wave. The universe takes flight, with positions indeterminate, momentum on the rise, velocity suddenly skidding to a halt, and time itself going liquid – bending, arcing, compressing, extending, morphing into new dimensions, with everything a function of the energy field, everything a matter of vector momentum, variable positions, and multi-dimensional space/time. And waves? Their interaction creates new configurations, some of which disappear immediately, some of which are entangled and, in that entanglement, create new bodies from high-mass particles. Everywhere, there are vectors, accelerating momentum, particles accelerating at blur speed, changing colours, shifting their spin rate, pilgrims on their way to new creations, and even sometime disappearing themselves. In the wave universe, matter appears out of nothing, just as much as nothingness also vanishes matter.

When mathematical knowledge deeply penetrates the social universe, which it most certainly has in the code productions installed at the cybernetic core of digital reality, what results is a second blast. Not the creation of wave fields in galactic space/time, but waves in earthly real time, with society imploding into fluid dynamics, with all its spin, shifting velocities, accelerating momentum, energy operators, escape

velocity, and instant changes of state between mass and energy. Liquidation is the sudden order of most everything, with bounded reality, rationality, bodies, and perspective melting down into fluid fields of energy – dynamic, hyper, accelerating, stalling, changing state. Not so much the information bomb, but now the wave implosion as the primal of the quantum imaginary, with *Wave Aesthetics* as a new way of looking at a world generated by the quantum revolution.

And what better guides for travelling in the quantum imaginary than the artistic productions of Rodin, Dali, Bacon, Duchamp, Velázquez, Bosch, Kienholz, Goya, Giacometti, and Monory? Particularly when classical art of this order is brought into the contemporary scene with a powerful series of artistic counter-gradients: Kiki Smith's *Wolf Girl, Born*, and *Body Trailing Blood* as counter-gradient to Bacon's searing vision of the butchered self; the Indigenous art of Nadia Myre (*Indian Act, The Scar Project*) taking Edward Kienholz's grim accident scene into an Indigenous artist's autopsy of the future; Rodin's *Gateway to Hell* abruptly translated into the new world screen of the twenty-first century through brilliant contemporary artists (Jackson 2bears, Keiko Hart, Adrienne Matheuszik, naakita feldman-kiss), neon dreams from Kathy Acker, and reflections on Tunnelling the Future, *AI Goes Psychic*, *Remix Identity*, *Datamoshing*, and *When the Drone Sky Rains Murder*. Looming over everything is the most important fold of all: Ecological Death and Fairy Creek, an analysis in three parts of climate crisis as contested on Indigenous territory involving courageous resistance against the destruction of old growth forests in Vancouver Island's Fairy Creek, as envisioned by Indigenous and Indigenous inspired artists located at Fairy Creek, and as theorized for these troubled times by Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*. While *Wave Aesthetics* may have been first formulated aesthetically by artists such as Bacon, Kienholz, Duchamp, Dali, and Monory, their art was only an early warning signal for what has actually now happened in contemporary times. To witness what actually happens in the heat blast of Ecological Death, we have only to turn to those other counterblasts all around us, certainly the contemporary artistic imagination but also the intensity of events today which are like debris floating by: fragments from the blast of the quantum revolution with its aleatory violence, numbing of sensation, granular surveillance, kinetic energy, and multidimensional space.

There's something else as well. Studying the counterblast that is contemporary art encourages a new way of understanding the contributions of these past artists. In important ways, they were aesthetic precursors to the driving logic of the current century, artists who painted for all to see the core codes of life in the quantum revolution. In their

brilliant aesthetic creations, artistic imagination rebels against its classical origins in the European cosmology that was the bounded rationality and radical split between space and time of Newtonian physics, going over enthusiastically and brilliantly to experiments in artistic perspective that have proved to be faithful talismans of the quantum imaginary. In their works, everything is there: kinetic energy (Rodin), multidimensional space (Duchamp), X-rays that map the social field as it plunges into slaughterhouse (Bacon), liquid time (Dali), the quantum void (Giacometti), the social as an accident scene with its aleatory violence (Kienholz), the assassination of sensation (Monory), and surveillance as quantum interference (Goya). Rub this mass of artistic production against the energy of theoretical consciousness, introduce the aesthetic intensity to be found in the writings of theorists such as Lyotard and Deleuze as a counter-gradients to the emerging artistic consciousness of the quantum imaginary, and the result is a contemporary version of the Big Bang. Everything starts anew with these atom smashers of the now superseded world of bounded rationality and Euclidean space. With *Wave Aesthetics*, we are suddenly in the presence of a series of aesthetic folds, moments of great artistic and theoretical intensity, that perfectly capture in their wild energy the fluid dynamics, wave patterns, vector momentum, accelerating drift, multidimensional space, trajectories of spin, reversal, and changes of state that are contemporary hallmarks of the quantum imaginary. This time though, they are not in the form of the discrete particles of quantum experience that are the focus of *Particle Poetics*, but in formative patterns in wave fields that might have their inception in the violent breakup of bounded space and time but, at this twenty-first century moment, represent in their aleatory violence accelerating energy and wild perturbations of the radiating, quickly expanding universe of the quantum imaginary.

Welcome, then, to the quantum zone with its parallel universes, lost dimensions, slow viral death, and energetic matter with life moving at the speed of blue stragglers, gravity waves, and primordial black holes. Welcome to the heat blast of unfolding life with all its beautiful uncertainty, where the future accelerates, present events mesmerize, and the past is sometimes quickly neglected. But not, of course, forgotten by poets who have always practiced the art of the quantum imagination. Consider the poem "Osiris," in which media reports on satellite imagery being used to discover the sites of buildings destroyed by war and covered by drifting desert sands, now brought into visibility under the sign of Osiris, the ancient Egyptian god of death and thus the underworld, but also the god of fertility and thus life.

Osiris

the flames of war drip on the innocent
the global power, all knowing
who, and where.

the terrorist, his own Osiris,
knife in hand, his crook,
voice so low it soothes
as innocents
dig their canopic jar

my cry,
impotent,
unheard,
blind to images
like fingerprints,
frame by frame
yellow buildings, now dust

the light gives time,
footprints in the sand
fade as the Benben stone
here Babbage and Turing
your math now music,
colossal, deciphering the mystery of death,
Osiris crumbles

my gods of silence,
my gods of brilliance,
you can find us,
stop the cry.
Osiris, have I let you steal my future?

Lynn D. Baron⁶

6 Lynn D. Baron, "Osiris," in *The CoInspirator: Anthology of the Bent Mast Poets 2019* (Victoria: Bull Kelp Books), 16.

2. *PARTICLE POETICS:*

STREET SCENES FROM THE QUANTUM REVOLUTION

It is written in the new book of revelations that is the scientific imagination that the quantum imaginary is on the rise. No definite boundaries, no immutable frameworks, no unbroken codes, life today has about it all the delirious intensity of the subatomic. That shadowy, invisible world of elementary particles – electrons, neutrons, photons, protons, neutrinos, gravitons, antineutrinos, antiprotons – moving at warp speed, n-dimensional, probabilistic, wild. In fact, the word on the street is that elementary particles in the standard model are all about movement, a high energetics of restless acceleration and unpredictable quantum leaps. Particles with ceaseless spin. Particles in constant rotation. Massless particles streaking across the horizon of physical matter with violent bursts of vector momentum. Streams of particle collisions deeply entangled in complicated knots of subatomic intensity. Photons of light riding undetected right through barrier shields of electrons without leaving any trace of their ghostly presence. Trillions of neutrinos, like latter-day messengers from the sun, lightweight and carrying no charge, passing directly through physical matter, through bodies, the last testimony of turbulent blasts of nuclear fusion in the sun, long-lost memories of exploded supernovas in deep space, cosmic rays smashing into earth's atmosphere. Protons huddling sheepishly inside the nuclei of atoms. Neutrons circling protons like the rotations of earth, moon, and sun, but this time like invisible glue holding together the nucleus of always fragile atoms. And all of this totally fluid, with the spin and rotation of elementary particles influenced by the surrounding pressure of those larger galactic forces: electromagnetism, gravitation, turbulent pressures exerted by weak and strong nuclear forces. All of this absolutely unpredictable as elementary particles routinely do the impossible: change states, thrive equally as wave and particle at the same time, explode with bursts of exponential change, follow their own decay rate

into senescence, always being there and being nowhere, always a Yes and a No, triumphant one instant, nothingness the next. With paradox its animating current, fluidity its driving vector, probability its gamble, and vector velocity its accelerant, elementary particles are like the riddle of life itself: vulnerable to the winds of fate, but for all that, rising to the challenge of the poetics of life in the hard streets of quantum city with all its charm and strangeness.

As in science, so in life. Particle poetics do not stop at the nucleus of the atom and most definitely don't slow down when all that pent-up energy of elementary particles slips the bond of quantum mechanics, becoming the stuff of contemporary society. Born in the heat blast of military nuclear explosions which split the atom, liquidated historical consciousness, and radiated the world with fallout from fatal collisions of elementary particles, particle poetics is everywhere today. It's life as a vortex: powerful vortices of panic, whirlpools of fear, contagious flows of hatred, black holes of charismatic energy sucking everything into their hidden darkness. It's the stock market which narrates itself these days in terms of rotations (from industrials to financials); its digital capital streaming like vapourware; memes travelling at vector velocity; the language of code-switching; the politics of spin as the essence of campaign rhetoric; the real secret of contemporary power as mastery of superpositionality (being both sides now); stories going viral, travelling at the speed of light, gathering momentum; the Zoom generation moving at escape velocity to shield their faces in virtual meetings; minor shifts to digital currency in marginal places quickly rocketing cryptocurrency to global dominance. It's the cybernetic loop that is life today with its entangled images, narratives, bodies, interests; the collapse everywhere of the stable into the fluid, the mechanical into the stochastic, the material into the virtual. It's the transition of the fixed, the immutable, and the unbroken into particle poetics of broken streets, torn up societies, and anxious hearts stressed by the only things that really seem to count: the fickle fluidity of life, the thermodynamics of anger, hatred, love, and failure, massless memories entangled with fading desire, the fortunes of life never seemingly under anyone's definite control, always subject to the greater play of weak and strong forces that surround, animate, and charm us, and just as often dispense strange and unexpected fates with a fast decay rate. After the blast nothing endures, nothing is permanent, social debris floats by like space junk on aimless drift. Blinded by the blast, we may have stardust in our eyes, but particle poetics knows of another pathway. It begins with the premise that all events today, major and minor, are tangible with meaning and non-meaning, that everything is fractal with the fragment mirroring

the whole, and that thought itself moves now at the speed of an elementary particle: identifying hidden connections, smashing unlikely things together, drawing into visibility the outlawed, discarded, and neglected, effectively creating a counterblast to the ruling vortices.

So then, some stories from quantum city, some particle poetics from the entangled world of art, technology, and broken dreams with all the fluidity and despair that entails. This is a particle poetics of museums without permission, urban graffiti in lonely places, street sculptures carefully hidden in the weeds, baby algorithms, blue stragglers, gravity waves, primordial black holes, and hybrid bodies. The blast of the energy bomb is everywhere. The sign of the times is graffiti art for life on the run. Screen addiction meets speedrunners and the result is contagions of aggression. There's trouble in the global village with its device life and book of faceless faces, but that doesn't mean that there's no longer aching memories for the future nor any less bearing witness to malicious scenes of human suffering. We may as a society have already slipped right through to art of the fourth dimension, but that doesn't preclude exponential psychic change in the direction of nostalgia for nostalgia. Just like all those elementary particles that surround us, that possess us, we're spinning at fast rotation within the nucleus of the quantum imaginary: particles out for a ride on the streets of quantum city, survivors of the blast, streaming in the vortex, but all the while armed with particle poetics as a way of finally seeing quantum.

A Art of the Fourth Dimension

Love Shared Among *The Hands of Time* and Secrets Silent Baked into the *Angel Food*⁷

Art always leads the way, perhaps because the artist's imagination is often the first rising presence of a future unknown, often unfamiliar, like daybreak trembling between darkness in its nightly immensity and dawn with its flaring of the sun, like a daily ritual of challenge and counterchallenge.

Consequently, it came as no surprise that we recently and unexpectedly rode our bikes into the future in that most unlikely of places and most untimely of times, namely the sunshine summer streets of Victoria, British Columbia. Our aesthetic purpose was limited and our intent was clear – to see two potentially interesting art exhibits, one photographic (*Angel Food: Images of Cakes and Nudes from a Bygone Era*), the other sculptural (*The Hands of Time*); one permanent, the other transitory; one vernacular, the other sculpted in the landscape – but what we did not really expect, but should have anticipated since art always has a way of swiftly bending reality in unexpected directions, is that while we thought we were only observing interesting art, the artistic imagination itself was busy reworking us, not only taking note of our tangible bodily presence but flipping our consciousnesses into the timeless time and the spaceless space of a very different bodily way of understanding time and space. Here, suddenly and without warning, summer sunshine in a West Coast Canadian city on a lonely island in the Pacific was left behind and gateways of (our) perception were opened to that truly strange place where we all live these days, wearing our new digital skin with minds moving through space with the speed of virtual particles and bodies stubbornly persisting in time pinned to the inertia of blood, flesh, and bone. We thought we had gone to witness new artworks, but

⁷ We are deeply grateful to Lynn Baron, a brilliant Victoria-based poet, writer, and artist, who both suggested *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time* as projects of prime artistic interest and who also turned out to be a fast biker with laser vision for sculptures hidden, obscure, and difficult to find in an urban landscape always mutating. As a talented photographer and painter, she made invaluable suggestions regarding the discussion of aesthetic perspective in general and the fourth dimension specifically.

what we actually witnessed was the writing on the (aesthetic) wall for a profoundly new, yet ancient, way of thinking about bodies in time and space, that point where bodies follow the strange bends and curvatures of time and sometimes, just sometimes, disappear into delirious space. We were ungrounded by the art of *The Hands of Time* and *Angel Food*, and in that ungrounding introduced to a new aesthetic alphabet for the future.

The artistic descriptions of *The Hands of Time* and *Angel Food* are beautifully evocative:

The Hands of Time

The Hands of Time depicts hands carving a canoe paddle, holding a railway spike, performing with a fan, carrying blankets, carrying books, holding binoculars, tying a rope to a mooring ring, panning for gold, raising a tea cup, holding a mirror, cupping Dogwood blossoms, and digging Camas bulbs. Each sculpture is cast in bronze and finished with a dark patina. Some of the artworks such as “Holding a Mirror” incorporate smoothly polished stainless steel reflective pieces. To ensure authenticity, Crystal Przybille worked with First Nations artists in designing two of the art pieces. The paddle element in the “Carving the Canoe Paddle” sculpture was designed by Clarence Dick of the Songhees Nation, and the gathering basket element in the “Digging Camas Bulbs” artwork was designed by Carolyn Memnook of the T’souke Nation. The 12 bronze sculptures are located around Victoria’s Inner Harbour, with one art piece at City Hall, The Hudson building, along the Songhees Walkway, and another at the top of Beacon Hill at Beacon Hill Park. The artworks can be found on buildings, lamp standards, rocks in landscaped areas, and on bedrock.⁸

Angel Food⁹

Angel Food: Images of Cakes and Nude from a Bygone Era is an exhibition of vintage slides, snapshot images, and videotapes by Adair Brouwer and Rosemary Sleight.

8 “The Hands of Time,” City of Victoria, Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, accessed 19 December 2022, https://www.victoria.ca/assets/Departments/Parks-Rec-Culture/Culture/Public~Art/HandsofTime_brochure.pdf.

9 Adair Brouwer and Rosemary Sleight, *Angel Food: Images of Cakes and Nude from a Bygone Era*, 2020, slides, photos, videotapes, FLUX Window Gallery, 821 Fort Street, Victoria, BC.

The dual imagery of *Angel Food* has an internal logic: the cakes and the nudes inform and modify each other in unexpected ways. The images speak of women's work, of links between the domestic and the erotic and questions of representation, control, and pleasure. Interestingly, descriptives associated with cakes are often given to women's bodies, such as softness, sweetness, appetite.

Both collections are examples of a burgeoning field of photography – “found vernacular” images. These largely anonymous, forgotten scenes were never intended to be art per se but today they own rich, compelling “visual qualities and complex social significance.”

Rosemary Sleigh:

The images of women typify a different time and way of thinking. Some reflect the genre of “Naturism,” others are closer to early Playboy photos; they pose with everyday items like a kid's wading pool or a magazine rack, or more provocative props – lacy gloves, garter belt. The potency of these erotic slides has enlarged within the context of modern technology and image availability. Their simple backdrops and campy poses created a sense of pleasurable levity that is in conflict with some of the expressions evinced in eyes and body language. The flimsiness of the celluloid and the careful notations on the cardboard frames, give a material fragility to their presence.

Adair Brouwer:

Vintage photographs amount to a kind of people's history of the modern world. Cultural artifacts scattered among flea markets. So much of the appeal of these orphaned snapshots lie in their poignancy (who were these people, now dead, and how did their lives unfold?), their immediacy (someone wanted to capture that precise moment) and the fascination of archaic technologies. To me they are art of a beguiling order, not the least because in this era of Instagram – where everything seems to be exposed – these pictures keep their secrets.

What is compelling about the juxtaposition of *The Hands of Time* and *Angel Food* is their common upsurge against closed boundaries of time and space and their equally common determination to use anything imaginative at hand – from vernacular images, found snapshots, and celluloid slides in *Angel Food* to skilfully sculpted bronze hands holding teacups, camas bulbs, dogwood flowers, paddles, mirrors, binoculars, spikes, and books in *The Hands of Time* – as aesthetic probes into time that does not want to disclose its secrets and space emptied of all

meaning by the overexposure, overcirculation, and overdistribution of images.

In *The Hands of Time*, this aesthetic strategy is explicit. Challenging the logic of settler colonialism with its privileging of the monumental, the vertical, and the celebrated, the sculptures along the carefully hidden trail of *The Hands of Time* do exactly the opposite. In fact, its aesthetic power lies in its deliberate obscurity; its compelling quality is the aesthetic perfection of its brilliantly crafted smallness; and its seduction has everything to do with its surfacing into visibility of a renewed, lived relationship between the art of sculpture and the landscape it inhabits. To follow the aesthetic trail of *The Hands of Time*, to scavenge for subtle clues to the presence of small hidden sculptures, is to immediately, and perhaps irrevocably, rediscover within the only memory that really counts, lived bodily memory, both a sense of time as persistence – the pleasure of the search among the junkyards and the flowers – as well as sculptural time, *time as duration*, an art of sculpture where beautifully crafted objects are quietly embedded in rocks along the harbour, fields of rustling grass overlooking the ocean, teacups nestled in lamp standards, and paddles anchored in frozen waves of stone. And it is so profoundly appropriate that two Indigenous artists, Clarence Dick of the Songhees Nation and Carolyn Memnook of the T'souke Nation, helped craft two of the sculptural installations – *Carving the Canoe Paddle*, and *Digging Camas Bulbs* – because what is most explosive about this artwork is precisely its shedding of the ideological framework of the sterile visual representations of settler colonialism and its evocation of Indigenous cosmology with its deep entanglements of land, time, space, and bodily memory.

What is at stake in *The Hands of Time* is nothing less than something deeply ethical, namely rebelling against the specious time and dominated space of the reality-making apparatus as it currently stands and gaining a hint, just a tantalizing, fluid hint, of a future reconciled with embodied time and lived space bending in the direction of Indigenous cosmology.

It is the very same with *Angel Food*, with this specific difference. Here, what is so eloquently foregrounded is that this is the resplendently stubborn art of women's memory, a form of memory that abjures silent complicity in unrelenting flows of digital images in favour of an insurrection of the imagination, unknown memories, untold stories, and unexpressed desires revealed by vintage photos, long-forgotten slides, videotapes, found photography, and marginal notes on fragile snapshots. There is nothing of masculinist heroism here, there is no



Figure 3. Crystal Pryzbille, *The Hands of Time: Carving a Canoe*, 2013, bronze, City of Victoria Public Art Collection. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Artist.

automatic homage to the speed of circulation, and there is certainly no celebration of the new. Instead, we are confronted with past memories of a “bygone era” as told through the recitatives of cakes and nudes in all their “softness, sweetness, appetite” – an art of the retrospective, not projective. But what is revealed possesses all the tantalizing qualities of a woman’s secret that lies just over the horizon of contemporary apprehension, namely that among the vintages photos and found slides, among, that is, among the flowers and the weeds of nudes and cakes, we are aesthetically jolted into the visual register of another space, another time. What is at work here is a beautifully perverse entanglement of memory, desire, desolation, and nostalgia. Everything is to be found in *Angel Food* precisely because it is not, in the end, so much a depiction through vintage art of a now superseded time of women’s bodily presence, but a powerful visual representation of the element of *incommensurability* that is always the essence of a woman’s imagination,



Figure 4. Rosemary Sleight, *Angel Food: Images of Cakes and Nude from a Bygone Era*. Courtesy of the artist.

at least as depicted in *Angel Food*. Here, the poses are standard, from Playboy to “Naturism,” just as the props are plentiful, some vernacular, others erotic, but what is hauntingly incommensurable is that this tattered record of found images stubbornly, persistently refuses to reveal its secret. When Adair Brouwer writes in her opening artistic statement that “these pictures keep their secrets,” she is stating the language of the incommensurable, that overexposure by images is sometimes a visual sacrifice offered by women’s bodies with purposively undisclosed

feelings, that found poses reflective of the times have often nothing to say about the untimeliness of desires not posed, unsaid, unexpressed, and that, in the end, the “pleasurable levity” of props may just mirror the sometimes sadness of bodies not propped, the beauty myth exposed in all these lingering, longing, desiring vintage snapshots and vernacular slipping away, always at the relentless bodily mercilessness of time passing. The haunting quality of *Angel Food* is the immediacy and intensity with which it delivers us to a previously unexplored, undiscovered sense of space: visual representations and secret meanings; snapshots of anxiety and desires untold; vintage photography and contemporary complexity; scavenged photographs and orphaned memories.

What’s more, in thinking along the fluid boundaries of *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time*, there is a dialogue in the process of unfolding. And it is aesthetic magic: ambiguous, uncertain, fragmented – the language of photography brushing up against the sculptural imagination. Here, *Angel Food* would ask the decisive question concerning the implications of *The Hands of Time* for better understanding a woman’s life with all its poses, props, silences, and secrets. And *The Hands of Time* might just respond that there are a lot of secrets – stories yet untold of despair, desperation, longing, dispossession, triumph, joy – baked into the hidden trail of figurative sculptural poses and props of metallic bronze. There is silence along the tattered trail of discarded visual images with secrets multiple and unrevealed just as there is deep love shared among the hands.

But, perhaps, something else. In the beautifully twisted ambiguity that is the meeting of *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time* in this particular time and space, there is the larger question concerning the relationship between photography and sculpture. We know this much. In thinking the two artistic productions with, against, through, and within each other, we are brought into the presence of something simultaneously ineffable and enduring. On the one hand we have faded photographic images of vernacular feminine beauty, erotic poses of women in settings incongruent – breasts bared in a children’s wading pool, Venus de Milo visual takeoffs in cramped apartment settings – with everything faded to celluloid pink like lingering blushes over erotic fantasies disclosed. On the other hand, we have asexual bronze tokens of historical memory, sculptures taking the form of intensely visual representations of past power, commerce, and culture hegemonic or destroyed frozen permanently in casts of bronze, like artefacts of a forgotten history shadowing the wasteland of the present. In this meeting of women’s photography and sculptures in the same city streets, there is also the question concerning what is being said about a woman’s bodily fate.



Figure 5. Rosemary Sleight, *Angel Food: Images of Cakes and Nude from a Bygone Era*. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Angel Food*, the question concerning women's bodies has photography as its medium of choice, with all those faded found images, sexualized poses, and erotic shots serving like an image-repertoire of the fate of depicted women's bodies under the slow pressures of time: forgotten, abandoned like so much remainder, trash in boxes of discarded photographs; waiting, just waiting, to be found by a woman's artistic imagination and in that rediscovery aesthetically repurposed for a final presentation of the beauty myth vernacular and vintage; a dead image-repertoire of hidden desires and forbidden bodily gestures.

But if *Angel Food* is explicit in linking the bodily fate of women to the transient fate of the photographic image, *The Hands of Time* is no less concerned with the fate of women. Those fifteen bronze carvings anchored in bedrock, hidden at the base of lamp standards, hung from buildings, pinned to harbour walls, fused in granite at the oceanside, and perched on a beautiful hilltop overlooking fields of flowers and grass running down to the Pacific are decidedly a woman's aesthetic odyssey.

This is a story of a city and its people, its accomplishments and destructions, its dreams and failures, told in a woman's way – a trail of obscure carvings of hands like a scribble across the landscape, an eloquent notation written on the margins of public consciousness. Here, nothing is announced in advance, the sculptures are modest, inviting interpretation; nothing is inscribed with aesthetic finality, everything is waiting to be discovered, reflected upon, explored, enjoyed. And not enjoyed from a safe distance or interpreted with an aesthetic register of mind fixed in advanced, but something fluid in its possibilities, literally a journey of discovery, a bodily voyage of overcoming challenges, following clues subtle and minimal to the found sites of the sculptures. And just like *Angel Food*, the sites, once found, can only be fully appreciated for their enigmatic quality: small statuary carvings of hands intended for permanent residence in the urban landscape but, like everything else, ultimately at the transitory mercy of time passing – buildings demolished, oceanside hilltops repurposed, lamp standards removed, harbour walls collapsed, bedrock covered over with pavement, hands with paddles, spikes, teacups, flowers, mirrors fading from view with the vagaries of the flow of time and changing urban circumstances.

Perhaps in the end as in the beginning what these artistic projects, one working in the necessarily fallible medium of photography and the other in the supposedly permanent medium of sculpture, have in common is their haunting expression of women's mutiny against forgetfulness. Never cynical, *Angel Food* is poignant in its visual representations, reflective in its language of image-recuperation, and deeply respectful of these found images of other women's ways of being, if only secretly, in the photographic world of their own hidden dreams. In the same way, *The Hands of Time* traces an intentionally zig-zagging trail of carefully crafted sculptures, all operating under the illusion that they have time on their side with bronze carrying the promissory note of surely outlasting the life of the city as well as the particular lives of its inhabitants – a putative signpost to the future or, perhaps, already a posthumous clue for future inhabitants of the city to decipher the past that is our present time. It also is a mutiny against forgetfulness, with



Figure 6. Crystal Pryzbille, *The Hands of Time: Tying a Rope to a Mooring Ring*, 2013, bronze, City of Victoria Public Art Collection. Photo credit: Courtesy of the Artist.

the hands in *The Hands of Time* doing what a woman's hands sometimes do: hammering spikes, holding teacups, tending flowers, holding up a mirror, supporting binoculars, carrying a beautifully carved paddle, anchoring a boat, nestling a book.

Perhaps contrary to aesthetic expectations, the real sculptures present in the artistic projects are all those faded images of poses erotic, trashed, faded, and abandoned; and the most intense photography are those carved images of statues, destined for permanence but probably fated to be transitory, of hands held up to the surface of (our) attention



Figure 7. Crystal Pryzbille, *The Hands of Time: Cupping Dogwood Blossoms*, 2013, bronze, City of Victoria Public Art Collection. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.



Figure 8. Crystal Pryzbille, *The Hands of Time: Raising a Teacup*, 2013, bronze, City of Victoria Public Art Collection. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

one last time in a last mutiny against the forgetfulness of time. In both artistic projects, vulnerability is brought into visibility; precariousness is valued for its complexity; and forgetfulness overcome with photographs, slides, films, and sculptural castings in polished bronze. With that, we are presented with a new gateway to aesthetic perception – multidimensional, simultaneously virtual and material, embodied and fragmented, enduring and provisional – in which three brilliantly innovative artists, Rosemary Sleight, Adair Brouwer, and Crystal Przybille,¹⁰ make of artistic perspective itself an anticipatory algorithm for detecting subtle trembles deep in the ground of the human circumstance that warn of big earthquakes coming in the contemporary digital shadowland of time transient and visual space imploding, with all that entails for human perception and bodily memory.

The Fourth Dimension

There's one other thing. Thinking thoughts delirious about the intersection of *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time*, about the entanglement of photography and sculpture, we receive a deliciously old-fashioned, landline phone call from our friend, Deena Weinstein, who lives, writes, teaches, and participates in heavy metal concerts in Chicago, that fabled city by Lake Michigan which, with its now dismantled slaughterhouse pens, exuberant, pop-up, can-do spirit of financial enterprise, and strict racial topologies marking its urban and suburban architecture everywhere, is always, in our estimation, the real capital city of the lost dreams of an America that never was to be. We mention our reflections on these two artistic installations to her, one about photographs of ghostly images of desire literally gone terminal as vernacular objects in the image-repertoire, and the other about sculptural pathways to histories long vanished, unappreciated. She remarks in return her fascination with photography as something two-dimensional (framed by the eye of the photographer and the object captured in all its complications at the plane of its visual surfaces) and sculpture with its aesthetically complex

10 For this chapter we are indebted in admiration to Rosemary Sleight, Adair Brouwer, and Crystal Przybille for renewing that long, rewarding relationship between art and theory with their shared affinities for impossible perspectives, glass hinges, silent noise, and aesthetic intensity. Working so creatively along the edges of the aesthetic imagination, including photography, video art, and sculpture, their artistic projects are like a beautiful multiverse running alongside, sometimes paralleling but often outpacing, the rhythms of life in the everyday.

three-dimensionality. In this case, unlike the representational repertoire of photographs of a “bygone era” which forbid peeking around their visual edges, sculptures are open invitations to the third dimension – to walking around them, observing them from all sides now.

And then we got it. When you bring photography and sculpture into intimate contact with one another, deeply entangling their different aesthetic aims through the imagination, allowing them to literally weave through, sink into, and speak to one another, there suddenly opens perception to understanding in another dimension, the *fourth dimension* – a form of aesthetic perception liberated from two-dimensional photographic representation and three-dimensional sculpture to a form of imaginative perception where things begin to float, interweave, intersect, appear, disappear. In the fourth dimension, ontologies of the known real give way to hauntologies of the unknown real and known unreal; photographic images are honoured with the solemnity of beautiful sculptures and bronze castings rise to the surface of the photographic imagination; and, in effect, photography puts on the skin of the sculptural, and sculpture opens its eye to the photographic gaze. With this, photographs become spectacular castings in visual space, and sculpture liquid photography.

If one were to make an artistic experiment of *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time* by sliding them together in the imagination like a collage of lost memories and quietly erotic sculptures, juxtaposing their aesthetic ambitions and disciplined craft productions into a shared snapshot of the present circumstance, what results is something profoundly new, specifically an aesthetic gateway to a radically new perception of time and space. Here, what’s at play in the lived time of *The Hands of Time* and the emotionally charged space of *Angel Food* is a brilliant gateway to the future, to what might be described as the fourth dimension where we will live within the hard solar winds of incommensurable time and visual space that does not tell its secrets easily. Among the cakes and nudes of vernacular images and across the hands of time linked by spikes, teacups, mirrors, and flower bowls, time is turned inside out and space sparkles with the space of life and secrets taken to the grave.

Indeed, if we think of these two projects not in traditional terms as separate, localized installations – one a street-smart installation at *FLUX Window Gallery*, the other fifteen bronze sculptures installed in the urban landscape, but in more imaginary terms as a cube within a cube, *Angel Food* nestled within *The Hands of Time*, we can discern something of their actual relationships. Think *Angel Food* with and against *The Hands of Time* – the world of space-bound images versus time-bound sculptures of bronze, visual representation versus embedded

time, memory prosthetics versus the felt experience of paddles, spikes, teacups, mirrors, and books, the secret lives of women eroticized versus the public exposure of artefacts on the trail of time – then we can finally know that we are in the presence of something deeply ineffable, of two languages of meaning clearly separate and just as adamantly deeply entangled. Aesthetically, the fourth dimension is always like that. It is how all contemporary art thinks, works, creates, imagines, and desires. All the usual boundaries of the disciplined mind of classic (Euclidean) space with its lengths, widths, and depths of normalized representation fall away, abandoned in favour of artistic imaginations that are always n-dimensional, fluid, just longing for impossible perspectives, unlikely juxtapositions, uncomfortable questions, strange relationships, virtual imaginaries. And if you go one (aesthetic) step further and don't confine the unlikely meeting of these two art projects to the artistic regime of collage, but twist these cubes of meaning in different directions, sometimes fast, at other times, slow, sometimes parallel to one another and sometimes in opposing directions, and even sometimes pulling them virtually through one another, rubbing the art projects together, getting a feel for their shared tastes, moods, and aesthetic aims, the result is dazzling: the aesthetic magic of ambiguity, uncertainty, fluidity, tattered boundaries.

Here, *The Hands of Time* would begin to speak through the faded photographic women's bodies of *Angel Food*, peering around the corners of all those vintage images of a past vernacular of women's life and in that peering around the edges of these images might just begin to tell the real stories of *Angel Food*, how each woman's image – sometimes flash-frozen in luminescent erotic poses, at other times photographed enjoying "pleasurable levity" in the kid's swimming pool – always contains other stories and secrets, other hauntologies. What are then, the hands of time of *Angel Food*? What hidden pathways, modest settings, obscure secrets are memorialized by the photographic sculptures of *Angel Food*? And what if, as in the case of the bodily pilgrimage along the sculptural pathway of *The Hands of Time*, we were to float imaginatively through, around, and into these image-sculptures of women's desires, playfulness, longings, desperation? What would happen if we were to actually look behind the surface visuality of women at play, at erotics, and at home and begin to carve into beautiful imaginative castings the stories of women that are not being told, the stories that, perhaps adamantly, do not want to be told, but the stories that must be told. What is the sculptural casting of women's hauntology? How do you capture in polished bronze the sigh of quiet despair that is sometimes a woman's playfulness? What if, in this case, we were to bring

the aesthetic urgency, the imperatives of capturing a hand holding a spike, teacup, or mirror through time, duration, and endurance to the flux of photographic images? What would we choose to memorialize, however modestly, and in that act of memory for all time, choose also to not remember, to put aside either through repression, forgetfulness, or simple human carelessness? And conversely, where is the hidden garden of nudes and cakes in *The Hands of Time*, literally this bronze sculptural pathway to a “bygone era”? What other stories, secrets, and hauntologies are left unsaid, silenced forever, by hands sculpted under the sign of performance: performing the act of holding a teacup, hands holding bulbs, hands with books, spikes, and binoculars? But where are the hands of eroticism? Where are the hands of doubt? Where are the hands of a woman’s wishful illusions? Where are the real hands of time: hands young, smooth, and strong; hands older, creased, time wrinkled, weather beaten, beautifully speckled with life’s history? Where, in effect, are the hands of *Angel Food*, those faded, found images which can be so seductive precisely because the story which is being told with such erotic urgency just opens so immediately to the question concerning what life stories untold lie just behind, or perhaps off to a yet undisclosed side, of these photographic memories of women’s bodies erotic? What is the sculptural expression for feminine abjection? How do you photograph the hands of time in a timeless time and a spaceless space?

Thinking on imaginary intersections, impossible perspectives, and tattered edges triggered by entering into the fourth dimension, that timeless time and spaceless space, opened up, in this instance, by the stellar collision of the photographic galaxy of *Angel Food* and the sculptural constellation of *The Hands of Time*, we note as well the prophetic significance of the name of the art gallery in downtown Victoria that provided an aesthetic home for *Angel Food*. Titled *FLUX Window Gallery*, the naming of “flux” provides a symptomatic sign that this art installation might, just might, permit entry into another dimension of perception. How could it not? The global art movement, or should we say the global *anti-modernist art* movement, called Fluxus may have come to prominence in the twentieth-century with aesthetic insurgencies that were Neo-Dada, concrete poetry, and broken, sometimes liquid, performance art in music, poetry, sculpture, photography, and mixed media pushed on by the hypercreative artistic energy force fields that were Man Ray, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, and Joseph Beuys, but it is still a brilliantly unfinished project, an aesthetic experiment in progress waiting, just waiting, for the twenty-first century. Waiting, that is, for that moment when the

real force field of contemporary power – namely science, whether mathematics, astrophysics, genetics, artificial intelligence, or robotic engineering – blasts everyday life apart with the violence of its hyper-speed, leaves nothing untouched by its powers of hyperperception, melts time into flows of “real time,” blows up space into so many virtual particles swirling in the data storm, and literally floods bodies with all the junk, sublime purposes, and random flows of data trash. When that moment happens, when the power of science really touches the nervous system of everyday life as it surely already has, then Fluxus – this intense form of the aesthetic imagination of the anti-aesthetic working feverishly to substitute creative, artistic process for the permanence of production, to insist that the outlaw edgy, squealing hinges of experimental attitudes should always be hegemonic over the sublime finality of aesthetic creation – well, when that happens, when science migrates into the soft-skin of digital life, when life as we know it disappears into the vortex of science and technology moving at the speed of light, then the art of the flux finally, finally comes into its own. And it comes into its own as the only form of (anti-)aesthetic consciousness capable of fluctuating with the digital flux of the time; the only anti-aesthetic which can pick out the flowers among the weeds in the fluctuating force fields of daily life with their impossible perspectives, broken connections, random data flows, bodies skinned by data, lives profiled for waiting data dumps, minds dissected by the laser surgery of all the “deep learning” and “emotion mapping” of artificial intelligence. Today, with every cultural wave a potential virtual particle, with every margin a possible centre, with everything peripheral a probable apex of something radically new, it should come as no surprise that in this city of Victoria, British Columbia – a city located on Vancouver Island, geographically marginal to the continent, a republic of progressive politics running against the mainstream of reactionary power, that in this city at the periphery of the gravitational pull of the continental land mass – that true to the beautifully outlaw nature of its aesthetic namesake, the *FLUX Window Gallery*, small, modest, visually sidelined, should be the centre of something radically new, something which, left unchecked, just promises as Leonard Cohen once said in his famous song, Anthem, to be that beautiful crack “that lets the light get in.”

And those cracks to a new gateway to aesthetic perception, to the imaginative experimental consciousness that is the meeting of *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time* in the fourth dimension, are themselves all about difference and repetition. *Difference* because allowing the fourth dimension to rise to the surface of consciousness by bringing

together unlike objects, in this case photography and sculpture, is the radical break that pushes right through the two-dimensionality of the photographic image and pours right around all the polished edges of the sculptural imagination. And *repetition* because in this aesthetic congregation of unlike parts, *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time*, there is the sound of a deeper pattern of life, and thus of imagination, or should we say the shattering of life that has always taken place in this island of air, water, earth, and fire. And that pattern is an antipattern, specifically the fact that Vancouver Island is situated squarely on the high-stress underwater pressures of the Juan de Fuca fault line, this incredible blast of pent-up energy that comes from the meeting of ocean-drifting tectonic plates and the continental land mass, colliding deep in the Pacific Ocean, slipping over one another in a slow-motion geological ballet, and one day, not just slipping, but violently falling upward, releasing geological pressures immense, unzipping the mountains, hills, and land of Vancouver Island as so much road kill on the tectonic plate way. Well, when this double pressure comes to the surface, this pressure of being an artist at the end of the road, at the end of the continent, far away from the centre of (aesthetic) things, and the body pressure building up of individual nervous systems knowing, just knowing, that someday the geological blast is coming, well when that double pressure explodes to the surface of attention, it always does so first artistically, this early warning system of big perceptual changes to come. Which is, of course, precisely what happens when the aesthetic plates that are *Angel Food* and *The Hands of Time* slide over one another, slipping and grinding as two-dimensional photography meets three-dimensional sculpture, until the pressure in the crackling fault lines just gets to be too much and everything blasts away at the speed of the fourth dimension. Who knew, who really knew, that one of the privileged astral gateways to the radically new consciousness already imprinted by science and technology as the governing perceptual language of the twenty-first century would take place in this beautiful city at the end of things? Now it turns out that it is actually at the beginning of something as dramatic in its newness as it is (perceptually) ground-shaking, aesthetically shattering in its consequences. We have a feeling that there are a lot of astral gateways to the future in everyday life, always among artists first, just waiting to slip the chains of normalized time and space, following the pathway traced out in all its ecstasy and desolation by love shared among the hands of time and secrets silently baked into the angel food.

Art always leads the way.

B Blasts of Graffiti for Life on the Run¹¹

Paint on the Tracks

Where does art go when it goes to be lonely? Where does creativity go when it wants to mix it up with the gods of desolation? Maybe to this place we know in this city at the end of things, an out of the way, out of time, and certainly out of space place down the way which you'll recognize instantly by white paint on the abandoned railway tracks, plastic garbage bags abandoned in the ditch, a grey suitcase neatly packed tight with someone's life debris in the weeds, and the sound lonely and desolate in the evening air of a panel of beautiful art in ruins, hanging down from the back wall of an empty warehouse, flapping in the wind with a keening sound, a flapping of moaning which lets you know in your heart of hearts that you have arrived at one of those astral gateways where the fierce urgency of individual artistic creativity is going to take you straight on through to the other side.

The scene is blank, soulless in the setting sun. Empty warehouses with faded red cargo doors, a shutdown martial arts studio maybe for keeping fighting muscles toned for a time of invisible pandemic viruses, sun struck rows of large silver vats brewing the promised pleasure of Fat Tug, a local beer, Mustard Seed trucks looking tired out after another night of rescue and mercy on darkened streets of homelessness, and the evening we were there, a beautiful, long-haired blonde model walking down the tracks being filmed against this background of urban grit. She was walking two pitbulls held tight by a golden chain. The raw menacing energy of the pitbulls was cut just perfectly with the seduction of her fashion adornments: high waisted black tights, crop top, and a stand-out belt with glittering silver rockstuds. Off to the side and definitely out of the filmic frame there were the sound and sight of hardness without relief that had fallen upon a woman's life: the approaching low sound of a motorized wheelchair cradling an older woman who had so carefully, so lovingly, surrounded herself with dozens of lovely dolls. Paint on the tracks for sure, but also a lot of paint on the souls at this place out of place, not that far from high-end luxury condos comfy on

11 This story has been researched and written in creative collaboration with Lynn Baron, who also did the graffiti photography.

the Pacific waterfront or, for that matter, from fleets of resting ships at the Pacific navy shipyard just up the tracks. And as if the paint on the tracks was a sure and certain signal that you had reached one of those astral gateways lonely and desolate where paint on the souls finally found a means of artistic expression, if you listened carefully, very carefully, you could just make out in the dusk the sound of breathing coming right out of the large-scale graffiti art on the vacant walls. Not actual breathing, of course, but the really serious breathing that takes place when aesthetics struggles to speak to us through the magical medium of graffiti murals on warehouse walls, torn panels of discarded art projects flapping in the wind, scribbled signatures of unknown artists, with all the surrounding debris, lives abandoned in suitcases of grief and garbage bags of remainders unwanted, bodily histories left flapping in the wind, with all its lonely wheelchairs, and even lonelier high-end fashion photo shoots.

Cinder Blocks, Stairs, and Tracks

with its sleight of hand my iPhone frames the image of black and blue lettering with radiant, soul-filled beams of light from the late evening sun. the pattern, the letters, the meaning of which is unknown, indecipherable to me, a puzzle of pathways each ending, or leading, upward, outward, downward, and inward, each side centred with two simple, stark stars of Bethlehem in white, eight in all.

and I follow the beams of light from the heavens to the concrete panel painted by IBL, or is it IBC, and why, I ask myself, do these artists scribble on walls of cinder block images foreign to my eye, incomprehensible to all but himself, herself, whatself?

and finally the remaining shards of setting sun leads me to KWOTA's image of, again, something indecipherable, yet my mind reads an explosion from the end point of a round brilliant cut diamond and is that because I am in love with the side view of the round and brilliant cut of my own diamond ring, the ring I wear on my right hand, a symbol of freedom? The artist KWOTA, too, paints, maybe strategically, maybe not, images of the white stark star of Bethlehem.

and so I start to read the images, define the images, and this reading, this defining originates from the images in my mind, images of my past, this next an image of backyard wiener roasts, red flames that are painted green, and yellow, flowing upward from a mass of purple and red coals, but are they coals? what is this image of colour, of lines

twisted to look like letters to look like fire, to look like a pile of purple and red coal? what is it telling me?

the raven haired warrior, breasts cradled in triangles of black leather, one hand holding a spear, the other pulling back on a thin, black leash circling the thick neck of the black panther, teeth bared, together leading a mass of tangled and twisted metal, and behind them, the red sun, or is it the moon, or a world from another universe, a backdrop for hordes of bats, their minions, that blend into a sister image of skulls and bones littering the trail. who is this woman? the artist's hope for humanity, the mother earth?

and more, so many more images of twisted and happy colour, white paint, black paint, on cinder blocks, on tracks rusted by time and rain, decreeing black lives matter, decreeing they do not, decreeing cops are human, decreeing they are not.

brilliant and gaudy, sophisticated, neon, mat flat, shiny streaks of paint, drips and blobs of paint, swirling and whirling in shapes and images and letters climbing walls, climbing stairs, opening doors.

a language of hope.

i see ghost images of painters along the track, on ladders, on chairs, mixing paint, brushing paint, spraying paint, and they are young, they are old, they are wizened, they are poor, dressed in tatters, dressed in Donna Karan, broken and blackened teeth, brace-straight teeth, they have diamonds in their ears, seashells hanging from their necks, they are lifted by hope, by dreams, painting their future, their hopes, their fears, but always, they paint in colour, and shades of black and white, with hope, the spectrum of colour.

in the broken and hanging panels moaning in the gentle breeze of the warm autumn evening, there is hope, panels of hope that fade to white, blow in the wind, and fall, leaving behind the wall, waiting, again to be covered, in colour, in hope.

the number 2020, emblazoned on four and five, maybe six, beautiful panels of colour, of black, of white, soon to fade, to be splashed with colour and the number 2021.

no longer abandoned, the tracks tell me, follow me.

i reach to pick up the torn and weathered pieces of cardboard scribbled with colour, with black and white, and they tell me I am here, and I know you were here.

i see the gym bag, packed tight, full, surrounded by overgrown weeds and grass, left, forlorn, waiting to be lifted. and it will be. it will be taken. somewhere.

that is where the art goes. it takes you there. somewhere. straight on through and past the other side of desolation.

to hope.

Art Gallery without Walls

An art gallery without walls, graffiti is the only form of art that escapes the prison house of curatorial gatekeepers, that expresses itself freely in prohibited spaces, that mixes its creative upsurge of hopefulness with an enduring spirit of transgression. Always tracing a vector of individual creativity and collective refusal in its every gesture, graffiti writes the skin of the new city of the twenty-first century. Power always puts down its territorial markers on the social bodies and material constructions of its cities. Everybody is in on the game. Power talks and money walks. You can just see it in the visual apartheid of cities, with their carefully policed zones of privilege and wealth, complete with architectures of high security, hygienic chromatics, sanitized towers of the glassy technopolis rising high in the sheltering sky, and all those buttoned-down faces and anxious bodies hustling along down the busy streets of short-term purpose and long-term desolation. Bubbles of hysteria, cities of the new technological order cannot afford the luxury of softening their hardened borders of tightly regulated urban space and time or, for that matter, of allowing the weeds of unauthorized hopefulness to sprout among the glass-clad skyscrapers, busy freeways or malls of sumptuary consumption. And, most of all, cities cannot allow the spectre of the creative upsurge that is the sovereign individual to make its fateful return. The eclipse of the individual was long ago marked by its reduction to a passive site of private fantasy broken up, once in a while, by quick dashes into public space to grab what it can of what's on offer – money, power, jobs, status, entertainment. The young know this, showing clearly their contempt for a game that's fixed in advance by retreating to the solitary pleasures of small screens, networked bodies trying to figure out the virtual rules.

But not graffiti art – forceful, insurgent, always seeking out those breaks, fissures, cracks, and zones of the unwatched, unpoliced, in the otherwise so tightly wound-up urban fabric. Impossible to reach steel scaffolding supporting bridges, tags sprayed across unregulated walls, complex visual storylines painted overnight on plywood construction panels, graffiti in alleys, malls, and neighbourhoods flowing like a vector of colour, rebellious, hopeful, and urgently creative across cities, countries, around the globe. When the vector of transgression that is graffiti art hits a political zone of authoritarianism the torture and murder of artists is the usual result. When the graffiti vector smashes into a commercial zone, the outcome is more equivocal. Sometimes strict policing of the artistic imagination is enforced, but at other times,

graffiti is taken right off city walls and repurposed into the high aesthetics of urban grit in waiting art galleries.

But whether physical violence or official adulation, something else is happening here. If graffiti art can colour the world today, perhaps that's because graffiti is no longer a transgression but a very accurate sign of the future. We know that its artistic essence embodies the spirit of the times. Just as foretold in the book of quantum mechanics with its vision of the physical universe as simultaneously wave and particle, graffiti is always about combining opposites and spitting away the difference. A mark of transgression and an upsurge of creativity, a tag and a defacement, graffiti art moves at particle speed with the aesthetic endurance of a wave that shows no sign of cresting. And for a technological society that is all about force fields and escape velocities, graffiti *is* the perfect art form. Its essence is to be ephemeral, transitory, shining brightly one moment before quickly fading over time or, perhaps, erased from memory by the spray gun of another artist looking for a canvas. This is an art of fluidity and speed. Definitely not meant to last, it sprays its signature tags and beautifully delirious images on the viscous walls of the city, looking for vulnerabilities, comfortable with the material reality of urban grit, working by night, spray cans in hand, greeting the morning sun with another spectacular tag on the membrane of social life. Decay over time is its fate. Speed is its operational code. Being ephemeral is its natural born instinct. Being transitory is probably what makes its tags so annoying to some, so deeply haunting to others. I was there/I am here is its artistic anthem call, simultaneously its most serious transgression in an age of digital amnesia and its most hopeful signposting to the future.

Postcards from the Galaxy¹²

Like this wall of graffiti art in a desolate urban zone. Discarded spray cans, worn-out slippers, torn pieces of cardboard, empty packs of cigarettes in the gathering weeds, broken down flowers and thick blackberry brambles, and all this accompanied by the low sonic hum of a hydro plant just across the abandoned tracks. The fall sun is setting reluctantly in the western sky, a warm breeze straight from the shores of California heats the evening air, cyclists, people walking and just sometimes straggling along the nearby path add a welcome sense of the social to

12 Photo Credit: Lynn Baron for all of the following photos of urban graffiti art.

the otherwise deserted scene. But it doesn't really matter because rising from the rubble and the weeds are brilliantly enigmatic postcards from the galaxy: large-scale graffiti art spray painted on a receding series of warehouse walls that provide an instant portal to time past, present, and future. We don't know how or when or even why it happened that some graffiti artists became carriers of the holy spirit, artistic prophets of the future expressing in the medium of spray paint on rough concrete walls something deeply tangible and profoundly evocative about the times we are living in, the places we have already exited, and the deep space we are about to enter as explorers of the human kind. Whatever the reason for this unexpected artistic expression of future, past, and present drawn sometimes in hypercubist distortions of perspective and coloured in multidimensional hues worthy of the apocalypse, the fact is that it happened, and continues to happen, in this, the most accidental of places and the most curious of times. Postcards from the galaxy on the back walls of warehouses in a deserted zone of a small city on the Pacific Ocean, at a break-point historical time in which lingering smoke in the air from fires south of the border, anxiety about the pandemic everywhere, economic recession and the sounds and chaos of the politics of hatred signalling the sad but abrupt decline of the American republic dominate the contemporary nervous system. Like truth-telling by spray paint, panel after panel of graffiti art in this western city at the edge of all things provides hard aesthetic evidence that art is no longer just an early warning signal of big changes coming in technology and society, but something else, namely that some artists, and in this case, graffiti artists, have broken right through to the other side of hopefulness and despair, specifically to visions deep and true of the very fabric of space/time as something suddenly tumbling, trembling, and drifting.

You can see this clearly in the paintings, spray paint employing the aesthetic blowtorch of graffiti art to cut right through to visions of the apocalypse. Some might call it fantasy, but we don't, unless fantasy means the uncanny ability of artistic perspective to hear the sounds of harsh storms rising at the furthest horizon of social understanding. Because that is what is happening in these postcards from the galaxy: visions beautifully apocalyptic of what is emerging slowly now, but soon at high velocity, from the ruins of planet earth and the very palpable death of the social. Consider two expressions of the graffiti art on silent display in this most creative of places for messages mystical from the future: *Raze the Dead* and *Ghost*.

Raze the Dead is the Book of Revelation coming to life with all its vengefulness and hopefulness, this time painted on a concrete canvas



Figure 9. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

of a warehouse wall by SIGLA, a graffiti artist living, dreaming, and prophesying at this rocky edge of the West Coast. In this panoramic artistic vision, everything is there: the sun blood red throwing shadows of illumination on rising colonies of bats in the evening sky, a cross on a ruined steeple over a crumbling stone church with the epitaph, *Raze the Dead*, signalling not the resurrection of the body with the coming of the Lord but, just the opposite, mounds and mounds of shattered skulls breaking to the surface of the surrounding graveyard as mute evidence of the death of the sacred, the death of god in human hearts gone cold in melancholia and the bitterness of rage.

And all this just a visual prelude to what emerges from the death of god. Certainly not hopeful signs of redemption, but something more ominous and yet beautifully dynamic in its painterly figuration, namely a high-energy, cold-eyed tribe of robotic weaponized systems leaning forward, leaning into the future, as a sure and certain sign that the apocalypse that is the eclipse of the sacred will be camouflaged by the appearance of technology as the new will to truth. That



Figure 10. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

the technological future as envisioned in *Raze the Dead* has no human inhabitants and definitely no sustaining purpose other than the killing energy of tangled up marching lines of a highly aestheticized robotic weapons system signifies the ascendancy of the worship of murderous technique as the mark of nihilism. But, of course, the vision of apocalypse doesn't end there. The sign of the human has not gone away.



Figure 11. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

The sign of restless bodies and equally restless human desires has not disappeared. Except this time, rather than the traditional vision of the heroic male figure beginning the resurrection of the human from the dead, what we witness is a powerful woman carrying a long spear of unmistakable violent sharpness and holding by one hand a fierce, raging panther held in check by the woman's leash.

The ground immediately below the panther woman is littered with skulls of the dead. In this apocalyptic scenario, the horizon of the sacred may have died forever in human hearts, exterminatory technologies may be on the prowl, but something is stirring, coming to life, getting ready for action in this human wasteland of broken down crosses, stone walls in ruins, and weather-beaten skulls, namely the will to power that is a woman of the Valkyries, killing spear in one hand, and raging panther tightly leashed in the other. The scene is set: the death of god with all its melancholic remainders, the dissipation of technology into murderous violence, and the resurrection of the human will to survive at all costs, in this artistic vision gloriously spray painted in feminist

figuration powerfully constraining with leash and hunting spear the pure libidinal energy of the male stand-in, the snarling panther.

Curiously, while that writerly painting etched on manuscript, the biblical Book of Revelation, culminated with a prophecy of the New Jerusalem after the appearance of the seven angels carrying the seven bowls full of the last seven plagues, this newest version of Revelation, *Raze the Dead*, does it one better. Here there is no recourse to a New Jerusalem or for that matter to the coming of the day of the Lord, but a very palpable hopefulness in the strength of the enduring human spirit. The sacred may lie in ruins, technology may be unmasked as violence, the sun may be blood red in mourning with bats like black vultures rushing to this scene of the death of the social and the eclipse of the sacred in human hearts gone hard, but, for all that, human will-power begins to stir again amid the rubble and the ruins. If there is to be a New Jerusalem in the apocalyptic vision that is *Raze the Dead*, it is precisely this: the ability to look straight into the abyss of the death of god and technology as nihilism, placing faith in the endurance of that so fateful human triptych of the future: the powerful woman, the deadly spear, and the raging panther. But then again, this may be apocalypse as repetition, with the all-too human cycle of fall and transcendence about to be repeated ad infinitum, this time with the beautiful woman with the panther of aggression and the spear of conquest about to take the lead in the rise of human will from the rubble and the flowers.

While *Raze the Dead* is about art as graffiti philosophy for end times, *Ghost* is entirely different. Less about the past than a still unknown future of deep space galactic exploration, *Ghost* paints a future which pits advanced technologies of deep space travel against the turbulence of astronomical matter. Here, far, far away in the distant void of outer space, planet earth with its trials and tribulations is nowhere to be seen. We are deep into the future with what is left of the human species moving at escape velocity away from a primal blast of explosive astral energy. While the powerful visuals of *Raze the Dead* tracked the slow drift of humanity through cycles of death, violence, and redemption, *Ghost* is different. Graffiti art as an exit strategy. It is almost as if the robotized weapons systems of *Raze the Dead* with their implicit affirmation of the technological imperative have given way in *Ghost* to the mutation of technology into spectacular vehicles of deep space exploration. The background of the graffiti art may focus on a collapsing neutron star with its radiating blasts of energy lighting up the dark galactic night, but the foreground spray paints the future of humanity as condensed into technologies of travel at high velocity.



Figure 12. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

A galactic collision, then, between the blast of dying stars with their radiating gravity waves and the speed of technologies of deep space travel: sleek, fast, and beautifully aesthetically detailed. In this graffiti probe of the future, the unrelenting human will to explore, to walk the dark abyss of galaxies far away, cold, austere, and explosive, is carried on, perhaps with more defined purpose, by technologies of astral adventure. The sparkling blue sphere of planet earth, all the more luminous in its startling beauty against the dark cold of the surrounding galactic void, may have long ago been left behind – ravaged, used up, abandoned – but *Ghost* strikes a curiously optimistic note in assigning technologies of deep space travel legitimacy as the successor species to a now forgotten humanity. When that day comes, when the galactic future foretold by *Ghost* as so wondrously painted on the walls of a still illegal trackside art gallery becomes core reality, what will we have to say about the eclipse of the human and the ascendancy of technologies of speed, with technology as humanity's successor species?

Would we finally conclude in fatal resignation that perhaps the fate of the human species was always to be a passive carrier of the gene of



Figure 13. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

technology. That having introduced technologies of speed as the full measure of the human, would it not be appropriate that that fateful day would come that technique would finally dispense with its human originator? Just like the graffiti art that is *Ghost*: two perfectly aesthetically detailed images of deep space voyagers running from the blast but always welcoming the next adventure in the spirit of computer games and (technological) action heroes. While *Raze the Dead* spray paints the future in terms of the death of the sacred, the will to technology, and the rise of women as redemptive action heroes, *Ghost* is more defined in its prognosis, namely that the future will be pure energy – the energy of star bursts and technologies moving at the speed of escape velocity – with the cycle of death and redemption left behind as one more forgotten human legacy on the way to the stars.

Or perhaps the future will be something else entirely. Not a repetition of the cycle of collapse, violence, and redemption as depicted in *Raze the Dead*, nor transcendence to star travel as the future as in *Ghost*, but an unfolding story of human devolution which is mythic and primitive in its graffiti imaginary. In the searing graffiti mural by the artist DAKAT, nothing remains of human presence except its technological successor, again an advanced weapons system, which is in full battle mode against a gnomish lizard creature with long blue hair mounted on a green dragon. The background is deeply and beautifully apocalyptic: a comet blazing across the night-time sky at high velocity, just about to crash into a triangular pyramid crisscrossed with rivers of streaming, molten lava, almost like tears running down from the third eye at the apex of the mountain peak. The stuff of fantasy for sure, but what kind of fantasy? Fantasies of doom, triumph, apocalypse? Certainly the graffiti mural contains traces of desolation,



Figure 14. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

rebellion, and terminal times, but it also represents an interesting reading of the tea leaves of mythological prophecy. The spirit of *animism* is everywhere. The towering mountain comes alive with a piercing third eye, dragons are resurrected from the dead only to be mounted by creatures with green faces, arms, and tails, technologies of war are in full attack mode, and even the sky is animated by a powerful comet seemingly on a mythic mission with a predefined destiny in mind. But it's not only the return of the spirit of animism to a position of mythic eminence, but the triumph of *animal spirits* as well. The mountain trembles with prophecies of apocalyptic desolation to come, the third eye blinks open only to find itself at war, the dragon and its rider give off tangible traces of aggression, rebellious or protective, confronting a technological horde imprinted with the sign of conquering power. The lesson in graffiti prophecy is clear. In this scenario, future times will probably not devolve into endless repetition of the same nor into singularities of technological transcendence, but into something more primitive, mythic, something also deeply embedded in the psyche of contemporary culture. As a technological

culture we have for so long taken pride to the point of hubris in separating the arc of human achievement from the underlying spirits of the life world. Rationality is our reigning faith, technological hygiene our environment, quick adaptation to changed circumstances our evolutionary principle of success, progress towards an unfolding future our core logic, the hard, remorseless calculations of the marketplace our dreamcatcher of the future, a radical split at the centre of all (important) things – religion/technology, public/private, soul/self, body/nature – our distinguishing civilizational feature. The graffiti mural with its violent comet, third eye, trembling mountain, armoured dragons, green-faced and long-tailed rider, and hustling technologies of robotic war tells a very different story. Everything in this graffiti mural bristles with irrationality. Things are messy, turbulent, and complicated with no signs of obvious progress, tentative or absolute. Devolution is the key signifier. Cold calculations of the capitalist marketplace have given way to the gaze of the third eye, rivers of fiery, melted lava, unheard of clashes between extinct dinosaurs and still only dreamed-of technologies of advanced warfare. And most of all there are *no* signs of radical splits. God is not in the heavens. The devil is not in the details. The human body with its tortured instincts has ceded to gnomes mounted on dinosaurs, the human story of suffering souls has been shuffled out of sight. There is not even a definitive disconnect between body and nature. Instead, the nature that awaits us has come alive with the power of primitive spirits – animal spirits and the power of animism. This is prophecy in the form of graffiti art which speaks clearly and definitively of the mythic return of primitive archetypes, the reappearance of the supposedly long-vanquished mythic energies of animal spirits and animism in a future already deeply inscribed in our cultural genes. When the dust storms of contemporary history finally settle, when the enfolding darkness of the nightly sky comes alive again with streaking comets with their fateful messages from the stars, when mountains implode and rocks weep with rivers of lava, when the third eye finally opens onto a primal scene of struggling dragons, gnomes, and robots, then on that day of all fateful days we may recognize the wisdom of this particular graffiti vision of the future. Here, the sure and certain signs of a future primitive, fascinating, and mythic already circulate in our imaginations as in our flesh and blood. That which has been long suppressed – the spirit of animism – will surely triumph. And that which has been long discounted in our rush to technological perfectibility, the libidinal power of animal spirits, will probably outlast the human species as the new order of

things in a time beyond time: delirious in its mythology, savage in its approaching battles, alive once again with the magic of comets, third eyes, dragons powerful, and robots menacing. Here the dead have, in fact, been effectively razed; the world abounds in ghostly intimations and powerful, abiding spirits, long-thought vanished forever, begin to circulate again, this time openly, triumphantly, seductively.

The Multiple Worlds of Graffiti Art

Painted on warehouse walls in the dead of night with no larger attraction other than its own qualities of fascination, transgression, and visual prophecy, graffiti art of this order is its own reality, in fact, its own alternative reality. It is as if time has suddenly split into the order of daily reality stumbling along with its usual routines, and the order of graffiti dancing into the future. Unauthorized, uninvited, not particularly welcome, it doesn't really matter. Zones of alternative reality like graffiti art charge themselves up with the aesthetic power of their own insistent creative energy. Making no obvious sound, quickly pushing past the slow weight of spoken words of praise or rebuke, graffiti art lives in its own system of meaning, its very own multiple worlds.

In infancy, it began to toddle into aesthetic life with the art of tags, those ubiquitous one-colour (usually) stylized artist signatures scribbled across the visual texts of most cities: walls, stop signs, windows, doors. Primitive art which has the great affirmative quality of inserting artists into history, scribbling aesthetic identity into public life for everyone to see. I am here. I have written my imagination into visual existence. Like the human life cycle itself, graffiti art doesn't stay a newborn for long, it longs to walk in two-dimensional colour, to paint beautifully figured signature signs that play at the edge of colour and style. Not particularly legible according to the usual rules of reading, graffiti art introduces its own rubric of aesthetic legibility, sometimes wildly freeform with multiple, intersecting colours and shapes, at other times literally bubbling its graphic designs into smoothly inflated imaginary words and signs or even getting more aggressive and violent by following a "sharp" aesthetic with its complicated morphing of letters. That's the alternate universe of graffiti art, this massive, creative insurgency of sovereign artists, sovereign individuals, just pressuring the language of visual signs until letters, images, and colours can't take it anymore and begin to dissolve into

aesthetic forms that their creators didn't know existed: bubble letters, throw-ups, steel aesthetics with its cut outs and spray paint, primitive signs with their delirious anti-aesthetics, spectacular blockbusters with huge blocking letters, cartoons. Sign-makers of the future, graffiti art rides the energy of visual aesthetics into the horizon of meaning and beyond. What's painted on all those warehouse walls, plywood panels, flat surfaces, corrugated frames, and urban canvases might be understood as graffiti art today, but what's really happening is an accelerated unfolding of the visual language of the future, with ourselves already deeply implicated in all those throw-ups, blockbusters, tags, steels, and sharp aesthetics.

The fabric of contemporary reality has been shattered by the information bomb that is digital technology, and we're drifting at fast velocity in the energy of its wreckage: the "creative destruction" of the old (analogue) order of things, the eclipse of the sovereign individual, the death of the social, fatal ruptures in the fabric of meaning itself. Life moves at fast velocity; power dissolves into force fields at the borders of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity; the digital self becomes a particle flashing across complex networks; digital society zooms away into a horizon of disappearances: small screens, huge archives, pervasive algorithms. Things just keep spinning like a centrifuge in the force field that is digital life today until that point where we sometimes find ourselves visually distracted by an unexpected alternate reality populated with bubbled letters, beautifully harmonized colours, blockbuster-style word icons, fabulous fantasy murals, and maybe even a deeply fascinating cut out or two. There are no force fields here, no high velocity, no immateriality, no networks, no surveillance archives, no controlling algorithms. Just a very material, very rough and dirty, street-smart, culturally alert, socially transgressive, beautifully outlaw, intensely creative, and prescient art form that has already taken full critical measure of the times in which we struggle to live. And all this, just a sideways glance away, an often involuntary perspectival shift attracted by a tag, throw-up, cut out, or blockbuster on the wall of a building, construction plywood, freeway overpass, or spray painted on the sides of passing railway cars. Seemingly everywhere now, the destiny of our once and future times can be glimpsed generations in advance in graffiti art, this aesthetic prophecy of a future that is already feeding on us, surrounding and seducing us with the visual energy of its illegible words, strange shapes, delirious patterns, and wildly free form imagination.

An art of pure energy for a society dying of its lack of meaning.

EPITAPH

Graffiti Art and Savagery, with Those Faded Panels Blowing in the Wind

It all began with murder most savage, remorseless, unforgivable. The city is Victoria, British Columbia. The year was 1997. The public mood then and which continues to this day is moral shock. How is it possible that in this peaceful city on the Pacific, a self-declared republic of progressive values, that Reena Virk, a beautiful, fourteen-year-old girl, could be suddenly swarmed one fall evening by her supposed friends, high school age, teenagers all, and murdered pitilessly under the Craigflower Bridge, her body abandoned by the swarm, the pleasure of the kill still warm in their hearts as they fled the scene of violence by the ocean currents below. Beaten, stoned, her forehead burnt with cigarettes, her pleadings unanswered, her vulnerability met with savage faces and stone cold hearts. All this fuelled by alcohol and drugs and definitely accelerated by a controlling young woman, an alpha female with an evil spirit, pushing the meek aside, imposing her (sadistic) will to power on the gathering teenage swarm. The community verdict at the time was that this was an extreme case of bullying by teenagers bored, suggestible, and hateful. Maybe so, but we thought at the time and still reflect, that perhaps what happened with the murder most cruel of Reena Virk was something more ominous, more menacing in its reality brutal and implications lasting. Not just bullying, but something else as well: the collective psyche of teenage swarming rising to the surface of an instantly troubled public consciousness as an existential sign of the times – murder of the scapegoat, the outsider, the vulnerable as providing bonds of blood, ties of kinship for the gathering swarm. Bullying with violence, bonding with blood, kinship with savaging the outsider, the scapegoat, the weak. A tragic reality in its own right but also an anticipatory event for dark times to come.

Almost a quarter of a century later, there are now many violent swarms on the prowl these days, sometimes whole communities, entire nations, bored, suggestible, and deadly earnest, looking, just looking, for the weak, the powerless, the outsider on whose bodies to enact the killing ritual that was prefigured that sad, sad day under Craigflower Bridge, the pleasure of murder most savage that holds the hunting pack together. Murder by violence, murder by indifference, expulsion, indefinite detention: the once and certain existential sign of these most desultory of times. We think these thoughts melancholic as we look at graffiti art high on the walls of industrial buildings in Victoria, not that far from Craigflower

Bridge. Every year, every week, every day it seems, these graffiti tags, murals, and artworks are reworked, repurposed, renewed. Nothing here lasts for long. From creation to extinction is only ever a spray gun away. But high on those warehouse walls, perched above the graffiti art below, are faded panels from an unknown past blowing in the wind, a few still legible, but most destroyed with the passing of time, unhinged, dangling down, ready to fall on weeds below. One in particular enters the eye of imagination. Titled *Enscape*, it consists simply of a drawing of a young teenage girl, blue, faded, anxious, and sad. Like all the other panels now disappeared it was a memorial project to the memory of Reena, an aesthetic, or should we say ethical, response by the surrounding community in shock trying to think of ways of turning other potential teenage swarms bored on chilly fall evenings into activities artistic, trajectories more positive, more satisfying, towards, that is, the usually sanctioned, outlaw world of graffiti art on warehouse walls.

And so, what is the relationship between graffiti art and memory? And perhaps more to the point, what is the relationship between graffiti and violence? On the surface, not much. For all its transgressions – tags unwanted, graffiti undesired on the blank canvas of city buildings – graffiti art can't suppress for long its song of hopefulness, its tags of creation, its complex, visual throw-ups of new beginnings in spectacular multidimensional colour. Its only real violence is to spray paint the sparkle of the imaginary on prohibited spaces, to tag blank walls and vacant spaces with distinctive visual markers of some unknown artist's individual identity: persistent, creative, and insurgent. But if graffiti art smothers violence with insurgencies of hopefulness, official sanctions with experimental hieroglyphs, that doesn't mean graffiti art has no relationship to violence, and particularly to memories of violence past and future. Often born in violence, either as a visual protest against authoritarian governments or as a spray-painted infraction of tightly controlled propertied spaces, graffiti art has always known, and known intimately, the language of repression, prohibition, and visual censorship. The cutting edge of artistic aesthetics in an age-long struggle against the anti-aesthetic, graffiti art walks the ambivalent edges of violence: sometimes in remembrance of its victims, sometimes as an outlaw visual tag against its spatial prohibitions. Perhaps that intimacy with the violence of the anti-aesthetic, that running street battle, blank wall by blank wall, spray painted sign by spray painted sign, inviting underpass by inviting underpass, seemingly enacted in every city, town, and street across the nations of the world, have prepared graffiti art to be such a profound futurist of violence to come. Or maybe something not yet sufficiently appreciated.

Perhaps graffiti art with its delirious combination of complex tags, complicated visuals, and beautifully intersecting colour palettes all mixed in artistic imaginations that run at the edge of apocalypse and apocrypha and all this done in a frantic, heated rush in the dead of moonless nights – spray paintings in the storm – is the only existent aesthetic prepared to absorb fully and deeply lessons from the story-book of life on the run. Like the graffiti aesthetics it studies carefully, this meditation on graffiti art and life on the run begins and ends with Reena, with this truly and unexpected combination of graffiti art so spectacular, so evocative on warehouse walls in Victoria, and faded panels blowing in the wind as a tangible memory of her murder most savage. So then, raze the dead:

RAZE THE DEAD

curators, gate keepers, plein air art, wo/m/an the artist, scribble chalk on the asphalt, concrete driveways, pudding on the wall, spaghetti on the floor

we are gatekeepers, we are the chosen,
united in our voice to create

something
anything that is silent, speaks

graffiti lasts

it lasts in the digital world,
the memory cards,
facebook,
twitter.
paper,
buildings
bridges
walls

and in the neural network of the brain, the weakest link

packets carrying images from one network to another, routed along tracks, fibres, hopping one router to the next

no longer transient, no longer ties and switches once owned by the military, the researchers, the images swim among tangled wires, servers, fibres, blue light optics, white lights, connectors

there is no kill switch

we worship the servers now our God, our Allah, we are ISP and IANA
everyone, we are god, you/who is the prophet?
and so Reena lives on, somewhere, somehow, someway, among the
wires, the blue light, where connectors carry her until we cut the lines.
cut those lines and the world belongs to you/who in the little house
down the road, the highway, the gravel paths to begin, again, to write
to scratch to scribble
who will cut the lines?
now i lay me down to sleep, i pray the Globalgodnet my soul to keep

C Cutaways to Street Memories of the Future

Recycle City@Rock Bay: The Afterlife of Objects

the dead that dwell among us
recycled, recovered, reincarnated
memories that never leave us
cardboard and paper, metal, rubber and glass
memories carried by trucks, cars, shopping carts
by hand, bike, baby buggies
by garbage bags shiny and boxes faded
the smell of fallen passion fruit gone rot
on roots exposed in rust coloured mud,
razor fence and pools of rainwater,
the wind, the cold,
clouds purple deep and dark
blue teal leaves and butter yellow flowers,
crushers crushing
a murder of crows

We are in Rock Bay, any city, anytime, anywhere.¹³ This time it happens
to be Rock Bay at the inner-city grit-edge of downtown Victoria, British

13 This story about Rock Bay art was researched and written in collaboration with the poet, photographer, and writer, Lynn Baron.



Figure 15. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

Columbia, not just a geographic edge traced on the maps of urban cartography but something more serious, a psychic, rock hard edge for processing the ruins of post-industrial society into memories of the future. Art in ruins meets the industrial wasteland at the speed of *Mad Max* in what was not so very long ago a pristine, beautiful bay just off the Juan de Fuca Strait leading straight out to the Pacific Ocean. There are memories here but lots of workaday business too, with art brought in to mediate the difference.

Murders of crows are circling in the late workday afternoon sky, flying short hops frantically, singing five dialects, their flights erratic setting the mood for what's below on the streets – flatline industrial desolation and unexpected uprisings of artistic creativity. Even the storm clouds above have got into the act. The streets might be lined with pawn shops, massage parlours, brew pubs, gas pumps with cut-rate prices, and almost everywhere the intense grinding sounds and metallic-acidic rotting fruit smells of huge recycling plants, but the clouds above – dark purple, moving fast, and dead sombre – radiate a spectral scene of natural beauty. In fact, if you stand at the open gate of the recycling depot where cars beat up, worn out, and finally abandoned go to die, looking



Figure 16. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

up at the clouds breaking through the near horizon of junked cars now trashed, flattened, and stacked up one memory of a better time on top of another, you just might manage to catch a glimpse of the sky above through this scene of cars in ruins and experience what we did in our heart of hearts, namely this imperceptible shift of feelings deep inside that soul-talked its way into understanding subconscious, whispering that this was one of those truly rare ruptures in ordinary space and time: a liminal zone – junk aesthetics – with awesome cloud formations above and post-industrial life recycled below.

The street tells the story. It always does. Rock Bay is where the city goes to die and, if its remaindered parts – drywall, cardboard, paper, lumber, rust iron, broken fences, recreation vehicles gone terminal, leaking batteries, furniture evicted, thrown out, not loved anymore – are lucky, really lucky, they might find themselves on the way to earthly remediation, to one of those magical plants across the western seas where all the rubble, discards, and just plain trash of the rising cities of the

New World are touched by alchemy, mutated into useful objects ready to start all over again the cycle of creation, use, and abandonment. All that seems far off and far away in Rock Bay. Here, everything is on the chopping block. A woman cheerful walks by with a pitbull growling held hard to heel, straining on a leash. And the tan coloured pitbull, led inside with a slight turn of the head, eyes black and narrowed, sees us: a street meal missed. A young guy comes dancing down the street, his flapping hands and waving arms playing frantically a song that only he can hear. He's wearing a Freddy Krueger Slasher themed face mask, heavy silver-steel chains strung around his neck, large hooks dangling from his belt, and a well worn black leather jacket with the words, "I'm feeling lucky," scrawled across the back. There are trucks everywhere – concrete trucks and fleets of recycling trucks – and cars fast-moving through the traffic. Some industrial trucks are probably from the bustle of the concrete plant just across the road which likes to blaze itself into history with the slogan, "Building From the Ground Up," with most of the trucks bringing their secrets to the recycling plants like urban morticians. But what catches the curious eye is the sight of a much-used, faded red sports car parked on a quiet side street, with what seems to be a functioning solar panel on its roof supported by a plastic jug of gasoline. There is no driver at the wheel, but the head rests for both front seats are carefully wrapped in raccoon fur wearing Ray Ban dark shade sunglasses. Just up the road is another beautiful old silver Buick, red painted hubs, with random pieces of metal welded onto the frame of the car. Mad Max comes to the city, twenty-first-century style. Floating quietly through the industrial background are bodies of the wounded, fatigued, and stressed out: someone riding a beaten up black bike towing a suitcase on wheels, others taking empties by the bag to the place where dead bottles go, and one person, an older woman, slowly approaching, hesitantly, her face in pain, her skin the colour of wax gone mummified. All this to say, it's a Rock Bay kind of day with discards industrial, concrete factories churning, business shops tired, and beer factories busy just rubbing shoulder to indifferent shoulder with stressed-out, hard-moving, serious-looking bodies on the streets, bodies that carry the unmistakable sign of the vulnerable, the powerless, the weak, the wasted, the remaindered, the soon to be replaced. Rock Bay, then, as a quintessential expression of the post-industrial imaginary.

But there is also something else happening on the street. It's probably been carefully planned by urban designers with future gentrification on their minds, but still it's unexpected and all the more fascinating for its radical aesthetic disjuncture with the sounds and smells of the waste remainders in these industrial surroundings. And that surprise

is artistic: a series of large-scale murals painted on factory walls, storefronts, sides of occupied houses, and backs of massage parlours which begin to tell the story of all the Rock Bays of mind, soul, and flesh. The murals make no concession to their surroundings. The streets are formless in their chaos, but the murals are absolutely attentive to form. The streets blast with noise, the art is silent. The streets are about the busyness of recycling depots, concrete plants, and brew pubs, the art is contemplative. The streets are about building the future from the ground up, the art is about what has been lost, and sometimes gained, in all the futures of the past. The streets discount the value of memory, the art is all about remembrance. The streets are about recycling plants for the last days of consumer objects, the art is about creative imagination edging towards something new. The streets are coloured grey and brown – the hues of recycled discards and throwaway trash – the art is visually vivid, a sharp-edged, full spectrum of colours chasing the rainbows of human imagination. The streets speak the industrial language of waste culture, the art is about creative production with an aesthetic, and sometimes deeply ethical, purpose.

Everywhere in this urban scene of art in ruins at the heart of Rock Bay, the ghosts of class and race circulate. Hauntology is the mood. Disappearance is the scene. Repurposing is the dynamic. Certainly there are clear signs of racial domination since Rock Bay is traditionally, that is by continuous Indigenous settlement over ten thousand years, all part of the ancestral homeland of Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations. In BC, where First Nations consistently refuse to surrender land rights in treaties never honoured, always broken, this is occupied land; this is ancestral, Indigenous land violated hard, continuously, and contemptuously by industrial violence: the wreckage of the landscape, the hard concrete, the greyness of the buildings, the smells of leftover beer in thousands of cans heading for the crushers, the sights of automobiles flattened and stacked row on row, all speak quietly, persistently, and evocatively of what's been left behind by the colonial legacy of technological culture – the fresh scent of earth, the eyes of forests, the sound of water, the energy of air circulating the seasonal passages of highs and lows. Now there are only clear signs of class discrimination. Certainly the visible bodies of dispossession, with their survival economy of bottle returns, boarded-up houses, and weathered skin. But there is also a lot of hard, hard blue-collar work going on: all that usually overlooked proletariat intelligence sorting out the remainders of consumption, manufacturing home-brewed beer, keeping small businesses going all along the busy streets. And there are even anticipatory signs of the presence of the newly rising class of the twenty-first century – technocrats, professionals, and

information specialists of the middle class – who probably one day will occupy this post-industrial landscape, transforming worn-out brick buildings into condos luxurious, rebooting empty factories into high-rises by the sea, populating the streets with software studios for AI, robotics, and new cartographies of aerial mapping, and just generally, just relentlessly, pushing everyone else aside, workers and the dispossessed first of all, in what surely promises to be a new turn of the wheel of high-consumption culture emerging literally straight out of the ruins of the post-industrial. And, of course, the owners of the whole capitalist enterprise are nowhere to be seen. They never are. They are probably doing what owners of capital, whether entrepreneurs embodying the animal spirits of the business Geist or bureaucratic managers of sumptuous wealth, always tend to do: working long, persistently, and skilfully behind the scenes at the serious business of business, dreaming dreams of money waiting to be repurposed in their direction, stacking up the fruits of their visions innovative in virtual layers of stocks and bonds, reworking this scene of post-industrial alchemy to throw a little sunshine on their future bright and their private purposes delightful. Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet of the exile of the soul as it migrates from dawn to darkness, might have been thinking about this scene of the last days of disciplined labour, hustling business, and splintered bodies when he wrote that “the white gods sleep ... shattered, burnt out, devoured,” without love or memory, in his poem, “Other Gods.”¹⁴

Rock Bay is like that. A place where “white gods sleep,” where all the waste, ruins, and remainders of a city at the end of a certain order of things, a persistent colonial order, go to be sorted, crushed, and reprocessed, the whiteness of a white culture literally burnt out in its high-consumption detritus.

Art in Ruins

But not the artists. Cave painters of the future, they trace in the blood of paint the chromatics of what’s lost and gained in this post-industrial imaginary of minds, souls, and bodies moving at the accelerating velocity of post-industrialism. You can see lessons learned in all those fabulous murals on the walls which cut close to the bone about what’s really going on here. Created as part of the *Concrete Canvas* art project, some

14 Pablo Neruda, “Other Gods,” in *The Hands of Day*, trans. William O’Daly (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press), 173.

are intentional acts of remembrance, others active descents into the labyrinth of industrial history, a few falling upward into unabashedly surrealistic visions of the wired future, with most taking the (aesthetic) time to provide us a new comportment towards Rock Bay, sometimes adding a little figurative colour to the bleakness of the streets or, when pressed, going all the way by inviting the streets to do a silent genuflection to the artistic imaginary. It's not that anyone will ever really thank the artists for their creative efforts. The murals were curated by city planners probably eager to fast-forward their ambitious future to transform the post-industrial into its next developmental stage of highly aestheticized urban chic. To this point, it doesn't seem to have had much of an effect, with trucks still trucking, workers still working, and faces of the people of the streets still hustling against the wind. Another art project in the lonely drift between failed designer visions and the hard rock of reality. But that is probably also what makes the art so interesting. This is liminal art for a liminal zone of post-industrialism. It matches the materialism of its surrounding with the immaterialism of its creative imagination. It is memory for the streets of Rock Bay which have no time and, perhaps, no particular disposition to think about the past. It is an art of futurism for an architecture of post-industrialism which has got its nose held right down close to the grinder of the specious present. Signs of "the whiteness burnt out" are everywhere close at hand, but this is mural art that is clearly listening to the song of other gods forgotten. While Rock Bay processes the wreckage of consumer culture, a kind of West Coast Statue of Liberty beaming out a hopeful message of recycling to all the waste, trash, and discards in its highly secularized, urban surroundings, the mural art of *Concrete Canvases* listens intently to the sounds of cosmology, to those other gods long neglected – gods of the underworld, gods of the noosphere, gods of fury, grief, satire, and playfulness – pagan gods for sure, but gods who have for all that been biding their time, waiting patiently, for that visibly terminal post-industrial time and space when "the whiteness burns out" and humanity becomes receptive again to the sounds of other spirits, other voices, other ghostly presences.

Like the deeply evocative elegy to the gods of the underworld painted by the Indigenous artist Bracken Hanuse Corlett of the Wuikinuxv and Klahoose Nations, as an artistic memorial lamenting not only the death by cancer of his friend Jim Fleming (also known by the nickname, Sasquatch), but also the death of his friend's faithful dog (depicted here as Black Wolf), his companion species in life and now in death as well. On the surface, the painting has a manifest purpose. Emotionally and visually compelling, its aesthetic originality lies in its immortalizing of



Figure 17. Bracken Hanuse Corlett, *Concrete Canvases*. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

the painter's friend and his dog in an exquisitely aestheticized, profoundly beautiful Indigenous rendering of their *spirit-forms*: Sasquatch and Black Wolf.

Having escaped the weight of earthly gravity, one by cancer and the other perhaps by the grief of a broken heart, the figures of friend and dog, Sasquatch and Black Wolf, assume a new, visually powerful, symbolic figuration in Indigenous cosmology – the deep affinity between friend and dog, like a wolf baying at the moon, is painted as passing from life to death, from human/animal companionship while on earth to friendship forever in the underworld. As the artist said in an interview: “They are both generous spirits. I wished to honour them.” But while honouring in painterly aesthetics the memory of deep friendship between humans as well as between humans and their animal companions is the manifest purpose of the mural, its latent content is more unsettling to the “white gods [that] sleep.” Here, breaking with secular visions of a strict separation between life and death, fleshy bodies and spirit-bodies, the painting provides full aesthetic expression to the immense spiritual power of Indigenous cosmology. In the latter,

friendships never end, human spirits never die, the dead always dwell among us, the bodies of the living and the spirits of the dead coinhabit, Sasquatch and Black Wolf speak to one another, and the meaning of death and life itself becomes equivocal, wonderfully hazy, in detail and definition. In this painting, the unbroken spirit of the First Nations' imaginary returns in full psychic force to the industrially scorched lands of Rock Bay, marking its return in the only visual idiom that, in the end, really counts – the language of hauntology, the language of the forgotten gods of the spirit world. Repressed from memory for so long, suppressed by violence, ridicule, contempt, and neglect, the spirit-gods of Indigenous cosmology will not be silenced any further. They will speak again, and they do speak emphatically, insistently, and evocatively in that most curious and unexpected medium for receiving messages from the gods of Indigenous cosmology – a mural planted like a sure and certain marker of the return of Indigenous spirit-possession to the barren lands of the post-industrial. And, of course, in keeping with Indigenous belief in vibrant matter, in a deep, lived relationship between matter and spirit, life and death, mother earth and the bodies of its companion species, some human, some animal, the painting resonates with matter come to life, with dead bodies as animating, living spirits, with evocative communication between the living and the dead, among all the vibrant matter of water, air, earth, and fire. As an epitaph, it is as if aesthetic tears are falling down the wall. As a way of summoning forth the spirits of the underworld long rendered invisible, the mural painting vibrates with the power of death as another form of life, with remembrance as a way of communicating with the spirits of friends deceased who dwell so deeply within us. In this painting, the gods of the Indigenous underworld return as vibrant matter. But, of course, the return of spirit-possession is not without its ambiguities and complexities. The Sasquatch is gigantic, generous, and furtive but also sometimes menacing. The Black Wolf is openly expressive with its grief, but also a powerful leader of the hunting pack. It seems that in death as in life, the gods of fate are fickle, just as the gods of remembrance to the seventh generation are uneven in their dispensations.

It is the very opposite with another large-scale, brilliantly enigmatic mural painting by Vladmir (Waone) Manzhos, a Ukrainian artist from the ancient city of Kyiv. In this concrete canvas with its surrealist imagery, the sun rises brightly on the emergent gods of the quantum universe – Hermes, the god of communication, most of all – with the gods of the mournful underworld beating a fast retreat. From a strictly painterly point of view, it is as if the Spanish artist, Salvador Dali, with his images of liquid time, bicameral bodies, and strange juxtapositions,

had suddenly travelled on the wings of Hermes to this post-industrial outcropping in Rock Bay. The actual setting of the painting is the bleakest of the bleak, a concrete wall in a parking lot situated directly across the street from a gigantic recycling plant with its wired bales of cardboard, crushed cans, and waiting caravans of recycling trucks waiting impatiently to dump their loads of trashed consumption.

The air is pungent with the smell of putrefying waste, scraps of paper and cardboard swirl lazy in the afternoon breeze, the noise intense with the sounds of running motors and heavy-duty waste compressors, and the colours of the day brown and grey cut with the faded white of aluminum siding. But none of that fazes in the least the spectacular aesthetic power of this particular rendering of the concrete canvas which, in fact, responds to the blast of the post-industrial with a seductive, artistic siren call of its own. Definitely not loud, definitely odourless, strikingly patient, vivid with its spectrum of rich primary colours, enigmatic with its image of a box-like factory with erotic lips spewing clouds of smoke, vivacious in its visual design, the painting answers the challenge of the busy recycling plant across the road with its own creative vision of technological society past, present, and future.

This mural is painting as futurist philosophy, made all the more urgent by its physical proximity to the furious energy of the recycling machinery. A quick net check of the artist's background reveals his aesthetic narrative as a painter based in Kyiv who has migrated from graffiti art to visual storytelling, mixing his palette of bright colours with an imagination sparkling with science fiction, numerology, cosmology, myth, and magic. It also discloses that his aesthetic preference lies less with visions of back to the future than with "jumps through time." It doesn't say, however, what is so immediately apparent, namely that this is surrealism for the twenty-first century. Again, we think of Dali's painting *The Great Masturbator*, in Madrid's Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, which is devoted in good part to Dali's painterly creations, but for all that could easily have jumped through time to this parking lot by a recycling plant on the West Coast. In *The Great Masturbator*, the colours are vivid, the styling sharp-edged, the mood ominous, the visual impression that of bodies stuck on their own repeat-repeat cycle, with eroticism reduced to masturbatory dream-states, and the unity of the body shattered into its component parts with telltale strings of waiting ants hurrying to this feast of the dead and dying. Here, the globe is enveloped by an eye on a stalk with an ear clearly separate, bright green in colour, floating on a pool of liquid, tossed carelessly to the side of the frame, perhaps a perfect depiction of the radical separation of the human senses, specifically hearing and sight, in a technologically



Figure 18. Vladimir (Waone) Manzhos (Kyiv, Ukraine), *Transformations* (*Concrete Canvases*). Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

amped up world. And we know that we are in a global culture wearing the skin of technology from all the visual signs in the mural, from the human (male) figure supporting the movements of the globe like a modern day Atlas, the galactic disc above circled by the signs of the zodiac, the gigantic cuboid of meticulously, indeed so analytically, arranged coloured panels spewing humanoid bodies in the background, with the colour green leaching out of the planet and forming its own oceans of the unwanted, the undesirable, to better drown the figurines, proxies for a failing human species. This is time travel at its most intense, just that point where the past of technological society (the factory-like box, the radically separated human senses, the hovering eye) jumps right through from past to present, with the future waiting, just waiting, for that moment when only natural disaster can limit technological growth, when only the waste of seas turned green can return discarded trash to its point of origin, when human bodies, most of all, are stuck on a dead-end track from creation to recycling, from order to chaos, and all this fated to be repeated again and again in an accelerated cycle of consumer masturbation, post-industrial style. In this painting, the tide recedes on a planet which has been stripped bare of meaning by the desultory gods of the overworld. Here, the more intense the speed of communication, the slower the road to wisdom; the more divided the human senses, the more certain the doom; the more vivid the chromatics, the darker the history; the more primary the colours, the more uncertain the human

destiny; the more definite the technological straightjacket, the more indefinite the human predicament.

Detox Flowers and Poisoned Soil

This scene of the post-industrial in ruins captures perfectly the general mood of the times. It is almost as if the post-industrial magic that is the art of *Concrete Canvas* resembles an old-fashioned ticker tape of the aesthetic order painting out in images what is taking place in culture, politics, and society these days ominous with its mornings dusky, full of lengthening shadows, strange sounds just beyond the pitch of understanding, strange sights just past the frontiers of perception. Our eyes might be on the images, but the mood, the gateway to aesthetic perception, has definitely been set by the gathering social drift. Everywhere now, there are feelings of anxiety, rumblings of panic, and sounds of lamentation in the air, but also gathering crowds screaming in the digital networks and across the skies of social media something about the ecstasy of suicide. As this is written, American society with its parallel realities and multiple worlds, all unaware of one another, all speaking from within the silo of their own fiercely defended patch of space/time, has quickly split into many warring political fragments, burning, explosive, dangerously hyperreal. When the political scientist Harold Lasswell theorized in the mid-twentieth century that the future would witness the manic discharge of private affect into the public situation, he might have been writing about the weaponization of Twitter as a way of fast circulating untruths, misinformation, and hatred in the emotional soft-matter of tribal followers. But that is only one vector of poisoned soil. A friend from Los Angeles texts a news report that the International Monetary Fund is quickly using the pandemic as a convenient pretext for imposing new austerity measures on its network of dependent states. The game is set. We all know the script in advance. Economic austerity for the working class, cutbacks in social welfare for the poor, the vulnerable, the weak, reduced labour protections for those fortunate enough to keep their jobs. And when the inevitable protests of the economically disenfranchised and the socially besieged occur, the script prescribes the use of all the weapons of violence available to the disciplinary state to silence dissenters and suppress politics in the streets. In this new game of parallel (economic) realities, the class of trained technocrats who keep the ship of state afloat and the engines of the economy functioning will definitely take care of their own interests, first and foremost. Their labour is fungible.

They can easily move across borders of corporations, countries, and continents. Their skill sets long ago achieved lift-off from blue-collar workers who are stuck to the ground with non-fungible labour in disappearing factories. Technocratic specialists are part of the new information class which deals every day in symbolic exchange – software design, game creation, network algorithms, AI, drones, surveillance, data dancers, and all the rest. And right at the very peak of the pinnacle, sometimes dreaming their dreams visionary, at other times redirecting all the anger, contempt, and hatred of their tribal followers against chosen scapegoats of the day, are the directors of the social suicide, that network of elites – financial, political, cultural, social – whose winding trail leads to regular summits of the new gods of the virtual future in Davos, Switzerland. Meanwhile, the “bonfire of the vanities” has exploded into a bonfire of the social, actually into the death of the social. You can almost smell the scent of social death everywhere these days. It is perfectly symbolized by viral contagion, with its enforced social distancing, with its cellular isolates of individual and family solitude, with its compression of the chaos outside into the vulnerable, stressed, anxious psychology of individual subjectivity. Everyone now in their very own digitally customized parallel reality, held together tenuously by feverish flows of breaking news, streams of political polls fast rising and falling, scandals breathless, gossip circulating, life on the screen a way of slip-sliding the remains of the social into the solitude of tightly compacted, emotionally triggered, often lonely, worrying individuals: trapped in the prison house of individual solitude, but, all the while, silent witness to the flames of a society on fire outside the windows of the soul. And it’s everywhere. Every day a new report about cynical power effecting a deep metabolic disturbance in the minds and bodies of people, about individuals driven crazy by the implosion of the social. Witness this news flow: a teacher beheaded in the streets of Paris, a church warden beheaded in Nice, Russian political dissenters poisoned, journalists murdered, public health officials met with death threats, Indigenous fishers in Atlantic Canada beat up, their processing plant set on fire by angry white mobs. Later, in the suburbs and high-consumption avenues of American empire, in the heart of the heartland of global power gone cynical, you can hear that screaming crowd getting closer, more feverish, more ecstatic in their public displays of rage, taking off their masks, fighting for the right to be sick, yelling that they just won’t take it anymore, the first palpable signs of a new political crusade – disaggregated crowds of weak egos unified by a charismatic leader – with its burning cross this time held up high to the triumph of the death-instinct.

So, what is art to do when its aesthetic prognostications about a future terminal turn out to be all too true, when that eye on a stalk, detached ear, and lips on a factory wall, all that brightly coloured surrealistic imagery of a world scorched to degree zero, just peels off that parking lot wall and becomes what it always was, and maybe always wanted to be, not so much a painting of recycled society but a living map tracing in advance the death of the social? What is art to do in the suicide? Remain a passive witness painting scenes of the vortex violent as the implosion of the social intensifies? Or something else, something more intense, indisputably more hopeless, but in that hopelessness also the first tangible traces of something resolutely, courageously, hopeful? And that something else, that flower of hope amid the rubble and the ruins is something close at hand, something that has never lost its fealty to the land, something that breathes the air of a different cosmology, warms itself at the fires of long neglected spirits, circulates in different currents, that something is the beautiful, inspiring, and magisterial hope that is Indigenous art. And there is perhaps no more brilliant manifestation of the hope that is the Indigenous artistic imagination than a truly inspiring set of murals painted by young Indigenous artists on plywood construction panels surrounding a vast remediation site just across the road from the post-industrial artistic magic that is *Concrete Canvases*. Titled the *Rock Bay Mural Project* and designed by two Indigenous artists, Butch Dick of the Songhees First Nation and Darlene Gait of the Esquimalt First Nation, the project involved a large group of young Indigenous artists, half of whom are from the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, painting their beautiful designs as memories of the future. The healing visions of Indigenous cosmology surround a deserted site of post-industrial ruins with its poisoned soil, detox flowers nourished by heavy metals from contaminated earth, and plants gone dead.

What makes the work particularly compelling is, at first, the sharp contrast between the profundity of the aesthetic and ethical integrity of the paintings and their transitory presence: visions of Indigenous cosmology painted on plywood sheets, temporary fencing for the remediation of poisoned soil – drive-by Indigenous art on a busy urban street, profound and neglected at exactly the same moment. The profundity of the paintings is unmistakable. To witness the work is to be brought into the living presence of another cosmology, another way of being, another vision of reality – Indigenous ontology. Indeed, this artistic expression of Indigenous cosmology with its deep commitment to vibrant matter constitutes such a radical challenge to technological society, to the reality-principle of the present order of dying things, that



Figure 19. Darlene Gait, *Tree Fungus*. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

it is immediately made the object of cynical neglect: Indigenous art visioning a radically different future painted on temporary plywood fencing surrounding a vast remediation project for soil poisoned by the industrial order. A perfect intersection of hopefulness and cynicism. The truth of Indigenous cosmology is being spoken here, the power of vibrant matter is being evoked, the healing spirit of land, water, air, and fire is summoned into presence. The conclusion is apparent. Society will either bend in the direction of the life-instinct of Indigenous cosmology or it will be quickly terminated by the death-instinct at the heart of the present order of events.



Figure 20. Butch Dick, *Orca Family*. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

The paintings in the *Rock Bay Mural Project* emerge from an artistic sensibility that listens closely to the lessons of the land, an ecology of mutual reciprocity among plants, animals, humans, and the land. Plants begin to speak with healing words and therapeutic medicinal properties: devil's claw, skunk cabbage, seaweed red laver blackberries, sword fern. Extending beyond strictly human parameters, the boundaries of family, of kinship, embrace other relationships of deep affinity: twin sea wolves, the orca family, the sun, wind, and water.

Here are ceremonial practices involving smudging and gift-giving as a way of summoning up protective spirits and honouring relationships



Figure 21. Darlene Gait, *Seaweed Red Laver*. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

that count. Here finally is an art of belongingness, hopeful with its meditations on the land, precise with its medicinal knowledge of the healing properties of herbs and plants, and active in its deep affinity with other relatives, other relations from the natural universe that surrounds us. Here, there is not the desiccating separation of human senses, no aggressive alienation of human intention from the land, no biblically inscribed hierarchy of human control over the physical universe, no limitation of the meaning of relatives to human kinship alone, but a more encompassing sense of a larger and more lasting family of relations: plants, animals, rocks, trees, the sky above us, the land beneath us, the fire on horizons far and near, but also the fire of wild energies within us.

But even more striking than the profound cosmological rupture signalled by the paintings is their stunning aesthetic breakthrough. No protected art gallery space for this order of Indigenous art, no careful frames highlighting juried art on the walls, no steady stream of official curators and patrons of the art, minimal publicity, and certainly no expectation of a lasting artistic legacy. Framing is by rough and ready sheets of construction plywood, the hanging of the painted panels camouflaging its real purpose as eight hundred feet of outdoor fencing around a poisoned soil remediation project, the location of the individual artworks a matter of fence design, very few art patrons in sight, the only evident sign of traffic on the adjoining urban street are streams of car traffic, with drivers passing right on by without a sideways art-wise glance. The atmosphere is pure urban noise with car engines accelerating, trucks braking, tires squealing and buses ramping up for another station of the cross. No hushed tones here, no designated visiting hours, no tickets at the door, no guided tours, few art reviews. Instead, the Rock Bay Mural Project is simply *absolute art*: no honour, no notice, no attention, without even the certainty of a curated aesthetic archive in the future. When the remediation project is finally complete, when poisoned soil sprouts grass and natural flowers once again, the legacy of this installation of absolute art will probably be the trash dump, with its likely final resting-place one of those recycling dumpsters down the road in another part of Rock Bay. Transitory, impermanent, ephemeral, this is a pure form of Indigenous street art: art which stands on its own, art whose aesthetic, and, indeed, ethical value rests solely and exclusively on its ability to conjure up with the magic of creative designs, brush strokes, and spray paint the hidden object of its overall artistic vision – Indigenous cosmology as the saving grace of the contemporary society of the busy, the mad, the distracted, the dying and crazed.

D Dark Matter/Dark Energy

More is unknown than is known. We know how much dark energy there is because we know how it affects the universe's expansion. Other than that, it is a complete mystery. But it is an important mystery. It turns out that roughly 69% of the universe is dark energy. Dark matter makes up

about 27%. The rest – everything on Earth, everything observed with all our instruments, all normal matter – adds up to less than 5% of the universe. Come to think of it, maybe it should't be called "normal" matter at all, since it is such a small fraction of the universe.¹⁵

Ideology walks the streets of imagination. Witness all those courageous protests by Black Lives Matter (BLM) and its many political allies, witness all those statues torn down, trashed, sometimes dumped in a nearby river in the case of Confederate monuments, at other times painted a gorgeous, shocking pink by BLM in Toronto. Taking offence at the obvious rupture of Canada's controlling algorithm – "peace, order, and good government" – police immediately chased protesters through the chanting streets, arresting anyone with specks of pink paint on their clothes. No kidding. That went on until everyone charged was immediately released on the juridical grounds that people cannot be found guilty of being speckled by the wrong painterly chromatics.

So goes the story of dark matter. Social upheaval rising from the society of the masses in the age of the death of the social. In these pandemic times, the pressure on mass society is intense: the viral pandemic with its mass isolation of social distancing and even the spectacle of professional sports played in surreal, hygienic bubbles of their own making interspersed with insurgencies in the streets, many protests by progressives, but others a product of furious backlash: by cars angrily driven into demonstrators, by shootings, by threats. Equal opportunity political theorists, we follow closely Fox News with its usually fabricated "crisis" of the day, breaking news accompanied by rapid-fire commentary and striking visuals of nightly riots in the streets of Democratic-voting cities (Chicago, Portland, Seattle). Strictly following the long cinematic narrative of law and order, marshals in white hats and the bad guys in black, every story ends with shots of armed defenders of "law and order," mostly border guards pulled off their stations on the watchtowers of the definitely anxious and seemingly beleaguered American republic and trucked into urban cities to defend statues of the dead, monuments of causes long forgotten, and courthouses holding the scales of injustice. Linking the data trail together in our watching minds, we are attentive to the fact that former President Trump's campaign team wanted to run him as a "law and order" candidate as a way of coralling votes of white suburbanites frightened by the daily Fox apocalypse of chaos in the

15 "Dark Energy, Dark Matter," Universe, Nasa Science, accessed 19 December 2022, <https://science.nasa.gov/astrophysics/focus-areas/what-is-dark-energy>.

streets. So we begin to wonder about the relationship between media optics and campaign strategies, thinking to ourselves that perhaps, just perhaps, the injection of armed federal forces into cities is basically the necessary visual background for effectively setting in place the grand narrative of America today as an unceasing struggle between the chaos unleashed by BLM and law and order valiantly defended by that long, thin line of blue, or should we say, defended by brown-uniformed defenders of the last frontiers of social peace and stability.

A perfect example, then, of the politics of dark matter. It's just that point where the will to nihilism is everywhere: in the street politics of right wing nihilism, the power of media to generate instant, spurious narratives, and the deployment of truly cynical electoral campaign strategies. From our perspective, what we are witness to here is not just the politics of mass society but something much more specific, namely politics in the age when mass society itself degenerates into the dark matter of the death of the social, with all its bitter flows, unpredictable incoherence, and wild mood swings. It has been a long time coming. Decoherence is everywhere. Breakdowns, depression, anxiety, panic; mind drifting into exile internal; emotion numbing by opioids, by mood-altering drugs, by frenzy; institutions dissolving, businesses collapsing; the media a mass machinery of dissuasion; the state increasingly a deterrence machine; the anxious self clambering out of its fleshly skin as fast as it can, taking the nearest social media exits to the entertainment marts in the digital sky: electronic tollways crisscrossing every technological platform that promise the sweetness of the fully exteriorized mind, the speed of fully ablated feelings, the junking of the self as so much data trash left behind. Social remainder – what's left of society after it has been harvested by technology – has its digital homeland – the cloud; it has its TikTok walking rhythm – algorithms; and it has its favourite flyways and byways – the network at the speed of jettisoning the body, living with the skull turned inside out, its surface fully exposed to every twitch and twitter in the media stream, its inner surface jam-packed with electronic probes for better digital injections into the waiting body's nervous system. No necessary coherence, no fixed boundaries, no functioning social constellation, just the quick dissolution of a centre that the poet Yeats knew long ago just couldn't hold, and wouldn't hold, into the dark matter of social remainder, and all this under the sign of the death of the social.

In fact, *decoherence* of the social is rapidly accelerating. It is on hyper-speed, fast torquing under a constant double pressure: the relentless *technological implosion* of the social by digital devices, granular surveillance, fast streaming accompanied by the political disarticulation of the

social by the rise of a seeming matrix of ideologies and counter-ideologies, all fuelled by the bitter differentials of identity politics. Literally, big chunks of the social have now begun to fall away from the social universe, floating away at first like cosmic dust. Dense in mass, indecipherable in intention, dark in opacity, directionless in movement, and silent about its destiny, mass society, or what's left of it, the society of the masses is now background noise to the media storm that swirls all around it. Radiating everywhere like whirling clouds of virtual particles having no existence of their very own, dark matter is the essence of social remainder. Dark matter is what remains when the meaning of the social has been squeezed right out of bodies, minds, feelings, relationships, communities, networks, feelings. Sometimes blowing up to gigantic proportions in the form of the silent majority of the masses, dark matter never speaks but is often spoken to; it never acts but is often acted upon; it never gives off any obvious signs of its intentions but is often the target of signals looking desperately for an answering response within the background noise. Polled by pollsters, debated by pundits, seduced by advertisers, proselytized by preachers, inflamed by activists, disciplined by policing, gamed by gamesters, endlessly conjectured about in video, text, podcast, and music, the dark matter that is mass society generally remains indifferent to the passing scene. Swirling like a cloud, drifting aimlessly in the stellar winds of the media blast, floating like virtual particles in the media stream, the social remainder is, in actuality, the growing *new* silent majority of masses in endless drift. Due to its opaqueness and diffuseness, the dark matter of this generalized social remainder can usually not be observed directly. It emits no recognizable call sign. It has no appointed spokespersons. Its strength is precisely that it is a *weak* force. It is neither being in-itself or being for-itself, but something radically novel: *being beyond itself*. Objectified, circulating, vapour-like, growing by the parsec as streams of social remainder flare away from the dead social, forming gigantic stellar trails of data clouds floating across the darkness of social space, for all practical purposes n-dimensional in its tastes, often with no obvious affect: bored, amused, seduced, alarmed, and then drifting to sleep again.

However, that's not really accurate. In pandemic times, the newest version of the death of the social – dark matter as social remainder – does, in fact, possess an affect, a *strong* affect. Like a viral will to power cutting to the chase, its affect has emerged from the psychic depths full-blown and ready for populist direct action. Enthusiastically mean-spirited, it is vengeful, scapegoating, willing to go all the way to exact revenge for imagined slights. It likes the company

of raucous public rallies where those who are weak shall be strong again, those who have been offended shall get their due, those who have been written off as “deplorables” shall be first in line after their political resurrection, and those who are deemed elite shall be joyfully put in their place. Swimming in the covering waters of anonymity, it takes instinctively to the network; it weaponizes words of derision, abuse, cynicism, falsity. Just read the random news reports. Acting alone, it sometimes murders its own children to take revenge on a female spouse; it shoots a judge’s son and husband at close range to take revenge on imaginary sleights from women past; it’s a loner guy suddenly barging into an evening engineering classroom in Montreal, ordering the men to leave with the words, “I want the women, only the women,” and as the male students meekly shuffle out the door without a backward glance at young female (engineering) students left behind, it begins shooting systematic and macabre, with twelve young women left murdered on the floor; it yells at the walls each night with vented (media) spleen as it drinks in the news; it prowls the supermarkets and the malls looking for someone who has neglected the social distancing rules or, conversely, for someone who has faithfully used a mask. Here, the screaming mouths, offended faces, and dead cold eyes of bodies slipping into dark matter do not want to go silently into the night. Social remainder does not want to be social remainder, but, now junked by history, disappeared by a crashing economy, scorned by smirking elites, and sidelined by events beyond its control, it is making the most of its predicament by energizing its spirits depressed with the only psychological fuel close to hand: *pure hatred* – scapegoating, directionless, screaming word vomit just spilling over anyone nearby. Doesn’t really matter whom. All that matters is the pleasure of giving offence, the joy of abuse. Basically, maybe it’s all a last hurrah for bodies tagged as social remainder just before they disappear from the social scene. And like those gravediggers of the night with lanterns held up high, like flickers of televised lightning across skies of social darkness, mass media often like to visit the most recent scene of carnage. Right on cue, in the case of liberal-leaning media, it feigns moral outrage, putting on the familiar mask of a mournful performance face when it gives sad witness to the televised occasion, or reversing course, as with Fox News, which likes to think of itself as speaking for the neglected lives of social remainder living in the shadow of the death of the social, it goads the silent mass to greater acts of revenge-taking, to further acts of service spectacular and murderous on behalf of the culture of hatred, perfectly timed, of course, for that evening’s nightly news.

And that's the real secret at the heart of things today. It is no longer just a matter of the death of the social and the rise of inert dark matter as the horizon of a social-media driven culture, but something very different. Now, it's not just dark matter, but the appearance of *dark energy* on the scene of the death of the social, volatilizing, animating, energizing, provoking the entropic, inert dark mass into public action. Dark energy has its charismatic leaders and its followers fused into a new serial grouping for the end of social times. But, most of all, it has a strong affect: *hatred*, the bitterness and loneliness of self-hatred psychically in combination with angry, violent hatred of scapegoated vulnerable others. This new surge of hatred, this new culture of hatred, is the dark energy required to bring the otherwise inert and silent world of dark matter back to life, providing all that suppressed rage, offences imaginary, sleights never to be forgotten, and failures never to be overcome an immediate object for their punishments, a target for their violence, making others pay for their own inadequacies, making others give penance for their own confession never uttered.

The weak shall be strong.

E "The Last Human Being": Poetry of Endurance

The Strong Force that is a Mobile Phone in the Hands of a Poet of the Written Word

The strong nuclear force is one of the *four fundamental forces* in nature; the other three are gravity, electromagnetism and the weak force. As its name implies, the strong force is the strongest of the four. It is responsible for binding together the fundamental particles of matter to form larger particles.¹⁶

The strong nuclear force exists not just in nature, but in human nature as well. It is precisely why governments the world over are so fearful of those rare individuals who through the eloquence of their speech, the

16 Jim Lucas, "What Is the Strong Force?" Live Science, updated 20 September 2022, <https://www.livescience.com/48575-strong-force.html>.

courage of their actions, the persistence of their lonely dissent, and the stubbornness of their ethical refusal are like forces of nature, potentially binding together previously isolated particles of dissent into larger, cohesive social movements capable of toppling governments, challenging ruling ideas, overthrowing established narratives, actually changing the arc of history. For example, it was why in the United States the FBI and local police forces, fearful of the rise of a “black messiah,” unleashed a chain of violence against the Black Panthers in general and specific black activists, including Fred Hampton, who was murdered one violent morning by Chicago police. It is why in Canada the RCMP have designated Indigenous pipeline protesters as “environmental terrorists,” with the probable aim of preventing the creation of a new binding alliance among Indigenous and non-Indigenous climate activists. It is also why the Australian government has recently prohibited the use of cell phones by refugees and asylum-seekers imprisoned in offshore penal institutions, thus imposing a cone of electronic silence to ensure that the stories of asylum-seekers are not told, that the histories of refugees remain invisible, that those incarcerated offshore remain as bodies that don’t matter, voices that will never be heard, asylum-seekers in distress who will never be morally grieved. Why though would power, which in this case always acts at the behest of settler colonialism, be fearful, truly fearful, of vulnerable, imprisoned asylum-seekers with phones? Why would power be frightened of the spoken word? Why would prisons in general and, in particular, offshore internment camps for isolated, distressed refugees and asylum-seekers in very precarious conditions be terrified of a mobile text, be panicked by everyday technologies of communication?

To read the beautifully poetic words of the Kurdish journalist Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains: Writings from Manus Prison* provides immediate illumination concerning the panic of even the most coercive power in the presence of mobile phones. Imprisoned on Manus Island in indefinite detention for seven years as punishment for remaining faithful to the hopeful dream of finding refuge in Australia as a place of democracy and freedom in his flight from Iran, Boochani wrote *No Friend but the Mountains* in Farsi, one mobile text at a time from his detention facility and eventually translated and published in book form. In its ethical urgency, its writing is like James Baldwin’s *Invisible Man* and Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, this time though drawing into global visibility, not the racialization of black skin, but migrants in flight inhabiting the stigmatized skin of refugees and asylum-seekers. Borders hardened, surveillance sharpened, hearts closed, compassion fatigue the new rage these days, this is a text which stretches fluidly and easily into a song of melancholy. It’s not only that Boochani’s words

come alive in their flowing streams from mobile text to unrepressed demands for the reclamation of the most minimal standards of social justice, but that *No Friend but the Mountains* actually translates the Kurdish poetry of song into remembrance of those murdered by deliberate violence, moral indifference, and abusive neglect. But not just an act of active remembrance, this is a form of writing that does that which is most difficult, namely transitioning from the melancholy of individual autobiography into a lucid critique of the paranoid cynicism of Australian immigration policy, making this a form of writing that assumes all the urgency of public biography written at the height of its times. Here, streams of mobile texts written during the darkest hours of seven years of indefinite detention – seven years of bearing witness to violent abuse, seven years of experiencing violence with no mercy to the vulnerable – are gathered into a searing critique of contemporary immigration policy. Indeed, following in the tradition of artists like Louise Bourgeois who made of the sorrows and splendours of her life the subject-matter of a psychically attuned artistic imagination, so too Boochani makes of his own life as a prisoner of indefinite detention – indefinitely detained in suspended animation, incarcerated not only physically but imprisoned as well in the even more intolerable condition of being a prisoner of the dimension of time itself – a truly brilliant meditation on waiting time, indefinite time, time without any definitive endpoint. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, might have written an exhaustive existential account of the internal psychic crisis that is *Being and Time*, with all its anguish, contradictions, and resolutions, but *No Friend but the Mountains* does something more estimable, namely creating a creative form of insurgent writing at the pace and rhythm of mobile texts that interrogates the timelessness of the slow time of indefinite detention – waiting time, time without hope, time crushed by violence and abuse, time, that is, of a system that is intent on transforming its victim into the novel condition of non-being. This is a story, then, not of *Being and Time*, but of the *non-being* of waiting time, of the use of abusive power to render bodies invisible, to liquidate the human spirit in the indefinite detention that is negative being. Because that is what indefinite detention actually is. A radical ontological experiment in the public guise of immigration policy – the planned elimination of the necessary human solidarity of social being and its replacement by the solitude of non-being. Refugees and asylum-seekers: stateless, imprisoned, isolated, physically abused, starved, psychologically undermined, prisoners set against one another in acts of random violence at the pleasure of prison guards, injuries left unattended, illnesses uncared for, lives compressed to hopelessness.

With this difference. *No Friend but the Mountains* rebels against the solitude of waiting time by a sustained, authentically existential reflection on the violent, humiliating experience of indefinite detention. Nothing is spared; nobody is exempt, beginning with Boochani himself. "Loneliness creeps under his skin/Until he suddenly realizes that it has enveloped him/It seems he represents the last human being."¹⁷ Rather than being crushed by loneliness, Boochani proceeds to write the autobiography of himself as the "last human being," attentive to the granular meaning of every speck of experience, certainly of the unceasing violence of the penal institution, but also of the totemic significance of the sounds of birds outside, the colour of the sky that passes from shadows of anxiety to gathering darkness, the changing shape of clouds; the animistic power of an electric generator with its abrupt breakdowns that seems to send psychic currents of anger and despair through the prison population; the silent gestures of assumed racial hierarchy that order relations between white Australian guards and their Papuan subordinates; the enforced perk walk of refugees and asylum-seekers before voyeuristic media as a way of "exposing" to migrants around the world the impossibility of Australia as a hoped-for place of refuge; the smells, sights, and noises of a refugee internment camp on an isolated island where suicide is common, by slit wrists, slit stomachs, slit throats, and where brutal violence by guards is as callous and indifferent in its application. Here, Boochani, the self-described, "last human being," wakes to find himself fully objectified by his condition – vulnerable, alone, disposable, forgotten – but alert to his own subjective responses to that condition and to his own lucid, poetic consciousness of that subjectivity. In effect, what we have here is a deadly contest between the dominations and power of a penal institution and a courageous rebellion by a prisoner armed only by an imagination running at the speed of a "horrific surrealism." Kurdish poetry meets Australian white nationalism at a hardened border in the global (dis)order.

The prisoner is a piece of meat with a mind that is always moving between the darkest, dullest and most worn-out scenarios ... The prisoner is captive to his own life history, and all those isolated occurrences take shape in the unconscious during periods of solitude and silence. However, they also destroy his sense of self.¹⁸

17 Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*, trans. Omid Tofighian (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2019), 132.

18 Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains*, 131–2.

With this difference. It is the act of writing itself which restores Boochani's sense of self, his power of imagination which provides a narrative linking the flight from Iran, drowning scenes on the flight across ocean waves and swells, the company of strangers commonly seeking refuge, memories of Kurdish family and friends, and reflections on life under the sign of indefinite detention. His indispensable "sense of self" is literally saved by the power of words and by the imagining of those words into a narrative stretching meaning across the fabric of space and time. Perhaps the last and best of all the poets of apocalypse, Boochani's imagination is dressed in rags of beautiful verse, dwelling in the house of Kurdish poetry, memory, and music, and, all the while, theorizing at the height of his (refugee) times. Because that is what *No Friend but the Mountains* really is: a wonderfully bleak, but for that reason, brilliantly illuminative account of what it means for the last human being to be exiled to a house of death and suffering, nourished only by a poetic imagination, a richly empathic nature, sensitive attunement to (his) human condition, forced to live for seven unendurable years in a tortured skin of micro- and macro-aggressions. In this writing, there is no definitive separation among art, aesthetics, and politics. Quite the contrary, this is one account of individual survival in harsh circumstances that makes questions of aesthetic attunement and active memories of Kurdish music, art, and poetry invaluable gateways to preserving a sense of self, and, in that act of preservation, sparking an ethical refusal of abusive power. Here, (composite) personalities come and go along the trail of flight and tears, each with their own tangled stories to tell: The Friend of the Blue Eyed Body, The Insomniac, The Cadaver, The Hyper-Somniac, The Smiling Youth, The Hero, Mani with Bowed Legs, The Man with the Cigarette Case. Written on the borderlines of private autobiography and public biography, this is "horrific surrealism" in its most delirious form. Not just an unlikely juxtaposition of objects, but lives blown apart by flights of escape, individual histories rendered invisible by power, the "sense of self" destroyed a system of implacable cruelty.

And that cruelty has a name: the kyriachial system. Adopted from feminist theory with its critical perception of micro-aggressions played out along the surfaces of the bodies of gender and sexuality, the kyriachial system is Boochani's theoretical prism of choice for reflecting on a truly radical innovation by the Australian state in immigration policy. As described by Bridget Conley in an essay for the World Peace Foundation titled, "Reinventing Peace,"

For those committed to the theater of privilege, nationalism provides the costumes. The script is a continual re-articulation of a single proclamation:

I have the right to not care for those in the exclusion zone. The performance reaches a crescendo in immigration policies that are not designed to grapple with real people caught in the system's snares (and certainly not in untangling the snares for a more comprehensive approach). Rather, "policy" on this stage is an attempt to control the imagination of who matters and how – such that precedes any policy discussion.¹⁹

And that's it exactly. What is really at stake here is control of the "imagination of who matters and how." For Conley, the key significance of Boochani's rebellion that is *No Friend but the Mountains* lies in its rewriting the script surrounding the legitimating narrative of kyriarchy. In this instance, the artistic imagination, whether expressed in painting, sculpture, media art, or writing, achieves what is difficult in a system of domination that permanently functions by enclosing meaning – public narratives concerning "who matters and how" – within intersecting circles of exclusion, control, and power. Art enters history by "re-claiming public imagination," by challenging the legitimating narratives of social control with counternarratives of social justice. In the writerly imagination that is Behrouz Boochani, "art has a chance of living beyond its contemporary moment, it can, as he notes, 'secure a place in history' ... art is foundational work."²⁰

With this result. Marking an insurrection of shared human solidarity against the deprivations of indefinite detention, *No Friend but the Mountains*, this reenactment of the ancient practice of carving the landscape of often desolate human experience into sandstone castles of storytelling, rebels against the dominations and power of negative being. And in that act of rebellion, text by text, message by message, something of the shared spirit of social solidarity returns to the world of Behrouz Boochani. Certainly a strong force in that the imaginative power of his storytelling, from growing up among mountains and hills of Kurdistan, the violence of Iranian fundamentalism, and the global flight across busy continents and empty oceans to the promised land of Australia literally spread like an ethically charged cloud, escaping the censors of indefinite detention to rapt attention by a global audience of readers. Definitely a strong nuclear force in that this was one form of writing

19 Bridget Conley, "Australia's Kyriarchal Immigration System: Employee of the Month, February," World Peace Foundation, 11 February 2019, <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2019/02/11/australias-kyriarchal-immigration-system-employee-of-the-month-february/>.

20 Conley, "Australia's Kyriarchal Immigration System."

which took wing on the power of eloquent storytelling and broke down the solitude of lonely incarceration, making of *No Friend but the Mountains* an irresistible force of worldwide moral cohesion. Before this, there was the official narrative of a white settler colony that put up the shield of hardened borders by a phantasmatic story playing skilfully on fears and anxieties of the domestic population by scapegoating refugees and asylum-seekers. Biopolitics at its most insidious with rightful claimants on asylum being first rhetorically imprisoned within *symbolic* bodies viewed in the language of biology as viral contaminants, fantasied forerunners of potential masses of unwanted and unwelcome migrants determined to violate not just physical borders but, more disturbingly, the received borders of the white settler mind. In this psychic scenario, what was really at stake was the question of Australian identity: open or closed, nativist or global, white nationalist or complicated by flows of migration. From symbolic imprisonment within scapegoated images of psychically threatening bodies, it was only one short step to the physical incarceration of the living bodies of refugees and asylum-seekers within indefinite detention facilities. Following the wisdom of René Girard's *The Scapegoat*, those assigned the symbolic function of scapegoat are invested by public authorities with phantasmatic qualities having nothing to do with their individual histories, but having everything to do with the political function of the scapegoat as an important point of moral cohesion for domestic populations. In this case, scapegoats are always key dimensions of the closed loops of storytelling that domestic populations like to tell themselves, stories always rooted in clear definitions concerning who belongs and who does not belong, which bodies count and which bodies do not matter, who matters and how. This is, of course, a familiar story of scapegoating and expulsion which, with the upsurge of white, right wing populism across many countries and continents, has become the common dialect of contemporary politics. At border after border, in hate speech after hate speech, this story of the two bodies of refugees and asylum-seekers – the imposition of threatening symbolic body which is to be feared, if not loathed, and the actual body which is to be disappeared from ethical attention in indefinite detention – this story has become the main story of much of the world as we know it.

Which is precisely why *No Friend but the Mountains* is one of those true historical rarities: a form of storytelling that marks the frontiers of a gathering global upsurge of ethical resistance; an act of writing that does honour to the writerly imagination by making the rustle of words a way of storming indifferent citadels of closed hearts and minds, a way of breaking beyond the deprivations of individual solitude to the

responsibilities of shared solidarities. Albert Camus once said that all history begins with the individual who says No, with the rising into history of that fundamental change precipitated by this simple, but profound, sentiment: "I rebel, therefore we exist." The power of words, then, the mesmerizing enchantment of storytelling, is to make the invisible visible, the silenced politically articulate, the outlawed grieved, the murdered mourned, the forbidden the beginning of an insurrection of courage. What is Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*, in the end, but an eloquent and inspiring continuation of the storytelling of absurdity and despair, political moderation against calls for the tyranny of absolute justice, ethical refusal in the face of demands for absolute murder, that was Camus's *The Rebel*. If that is the case, as we believe it is, then the power of writing has, once again, reached the apogee of its historical vocation, namely to reclaim its rightful place as a strong force for social justice, a strong nuclear force in a form of storytelling that weaves its way into the tangled hearts of shared human solidarities.

Crack the codes of public imagination concerning which bodies matter, create new narratives of care for those in the "exclusion zone," extend communities of friendship on the basis of ethical affinity, and what was a matter of *private* autobiography in *No Friend but the Mountains* quickly becomes *public* biography for a new world of social justice rising and falling like solar cycles of the always waiting sun – daybreak over shadowed mountains. Prisoner, in your castle of words where love rebels against the dark, compassion melts solitude, memories sing from the future, and writing shelters from the storm, you have finally broken the locks of indefinite detention. In your imagination, there is no refuge for hatred, no asylum for evil, no privacy for crime, no harm not reported, no life of a companion left unrecorded. You are the chosen scapegoat writing the story of the sacrifice, the refugee with hope, the asylum-seeker of the greater truth, the last human being in a world suddenly divested of justice, stripped of the saving grace of friendship, immune to the ethical demands of care.

And something else as well which has to do with *No Friend but the Mountains* as a tutor text for creating a new vocabulary concerning humans in transit. In this case, why would hardened borders, fearful populations, the politics of scapegoating and indefinite detention be set-piece contemporary responses to the global migratory reality of humans in transit, sometimes refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants as defined normatively by International treaties, but, most often, humans on the move: displaced by climate change, fleeing violence, lives destroyed by the harsh economic realities of globalization in a technological age, growing human migrations of populations literally rendered surplus

by the overriding interests of hegemonic societies. Here, what is at stake for humans in transit is not only an inalienable human right to personal security but also an ethical demand for recognition as humans invested with singular individuality and complex social histories. We are all too familiar with the story of hardened borders these days: protective barriers against often fantasied threats from the outside; zones of economic exclusion; demarcations of granular discrimination between bodies that count and those that do not; division points between humans politically secured in bunker states and vulnerable humans in transit. But what of those other visions of borders struggling to occupy the public imagination – the expanded borders of social justice with its global focus on ethical responsibility for the fate of humans on the move? What if, in this case, the really decisive contribution of *No Friend but the Mountains* was to point the way to a world without borders? If this proposal should meet with an immediate negative response due its perceived impracticality or political inconvenience, it could also be replied that borderlines are always fictitious: political cartography imposed on territory by force, zones of fluidity, mutable, fluctuating in response to changed political realities; anchored in popular sentiments by continuous ideological reinforcement.

As with the skies above, the watery depths of the ocean, fires on distant shores, and welcoming shorelines to humans on the move that is the essence of *No Friend but the Mountains*, we can know for a certainty that the earth has itself has no natural borders, that humans on the move only wish to make an elemental claim on that which is most natural, specifically to transit their bodies to a borderless world which, while an essential dimension of nature, is impeded by the often reactionary force of political nature. That is, in fact, what may make humans in transit the last and best of all human beings – an ethical challenge for the creation of a form of public imagination that would transit hardened borders into a world without borders, fearful domestic populations into individuals with a minimum of human compassion, targeted scapegoats into talisman of a new and better future. Ironically, for multinational businesses, technological platforms, and hegemonic political empires, a world without borders already exists. We know with a certainty that global power has already slipped beyond a bordered world with its triumphant projects projecting globalized transnationalism across worldwide political empires. Equally it is already an economic platitude that advanced capitalism thrives and, in its own self-estimation, can only thrive in a world without borders, that is, after all, the basic precondition for fluid, global flows of capital, technology, trade, and frenetic resource extraction. In the digital age, technological platforms have

already followed the virtual commodity-form and, with it, to the viral power of global spectrum streaming and advertising algorithms built on the ruins of national communicative sovereignty. So why not then an ethically equivalent world for humans on the move who are simultaneously the real casualties of hegemonic power and globalized capitalism and, yet in their distress, harbingers of an approaching revolution that is, in the end as in the beginning, the ethical essence of a world without borders? What has already been accomplished as objective necessity by power, capitalism, and technology will now, under the sign of humans in transit, be accomplished as subjective fact.

F Forensic Architecture and the Empire of Crime

Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency, based at Goldsmiths, University of London, investigating human rights violations including violence committed by states, police forces, militaries, and corporations. FA works in partnership with institutions across civil society, from grassroots activists, to legal teams, to international NGOs and media organisations, to carry out investigations with and on behalf of communities and individuals affected by conflict, police brutality, border regimes and environmental violence.

Our investigations employ cutting-edge techniques in spatial and architectural analysis, open source investigation, digital modelling, and immersive technologies, as well as documentary research, situated interviews, and academic collaboration. Findings from our investigations have been presented in national and international courtrooms, parliamentary inquiries, and exhibitions at some of the world's leading cultural institutions and in international media, as well as in citizen's tribunals and community assemblies.²¹

Everything now, it seems, is in haste to run back to its origins. In Greek cosmology, it was known as the implacable law of fatal destiny.

21 "About," Forensic Architecture, accessed 19 December 2022, forensic-architecture.org/about/agency.

For its Christian successors, it was worshipped as the religious principle of predestination. And, for us, pilgrims of the twenty-first century as we are, it is clearly written in the stars, coded in the flesh of all living beings, and inscribed in the elementary motions of matter itself. The theatre of daybreak may be announced every morning by the rising of the sun as it burns its way across the light-compass of the hours of the day, but faithful to the injunctions of fatal destiny, the sun always returns on astronomical cue to its origins in the melancholy twilight of gathering darkness. So too, the bodies of all living creatures – flocks of birds taking wing, animals roaming, restless humans – operate under the spell of fatal destiny: breaking cover with the miracle of birth, soaring on the wings of living energy, but always fated to return to the often unwanted, usually resisted, gift of death at the decline of the dying day. The pleasure of life may lie in its beautiful surges, unexpected twists, and unknown risks, but, for all that, death is sovereign, finitude rules, and the fatal seduction of the trajectory of origins is the last and most severe commandment of both the life of the stars and the tragic poetry of life itself. Last exit to the truth of death is the common vocabulary of all living matter.

As with life, so too, with the question of power. Through the plump years of the twentieth century, power may have flirted briefly with the illusion of a new fateful alliance with life. Consider, for example, the truly brilliant writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who in his enigmatic text, *The History of Sexuality*, stated the case most eloquently, namely that power in the modern century, abjuring its previous connections with pure negation, whether administered by governments, judiciary, or penal institutions, had now installed itself, forcefully and insidiously, in the *conceptual language* of society itself – its normative order, public regulations, medical procedures, sexual prescriptions, and genetic codes. Installed itself, that is, not as a power that says *no* – a form of power that speaks in blood, violence, and prohibition – but something else entirely, a new form of power, specifically flows of power, *soft power*, that says *yes*, that speaks in the affirmative language of facilitating the social good. Soft power, then, not as punishment but seduction; not negation, but affirmation; certainly not death, but power circulating on behalf of life itself – a soft alliance for soft societies meant to nurture forms of behaviour that would contribute to the steady decline of the life of society – a power, which, in reality, reinforces the persistence of established relations of power. Power as life itself, then, as the marquee feature of the politics of illusion that took such a strong hold on public imagination and private desires in the halcyon days of the last of the modern centuries.

Who really knows what has happened – the pandemic, financial contractions, the stresses of climate change, gender shifts, new orders of sexualities, global flows of migrants, the upsurge of dissenting publics, panic in received guardians of social norms, the psychic blast of cancel culture, the reactionary politics of right wing populism, unrelenting demands for social justice – whatever the specific reason, or perhaps, complex of different reasons, power has now decidedly abandoned the soft illusions of power as life and, with that, swiftly discarded the politics of facilitation. At this, the breaking dawn of the twenty-first century, the only thing that seems to count, really count, is the power of increasingly brutal command – the management of command over individuals and society as a whole whether for reasons of public security, silencing political dissent, or control of immigration at hardened borders – that reasserts an ancient alliance between power and death. The triumph of sanguinary power – blood politics – then, whether taking the form of internment camps, police brutality, indefinite detention, torture chambers, predatory hunts for vulnerable migrants, marks that moment when power, losing confidence in its facilitating powers of soft persuasion, unmasked itself to reveal the coldness of the power of the state, the cruelty of authoritarian capitalism, and the indifference of sheltered populations to those outside hardened walls of privilege.

That power now speaks in the name of death, not life, is evidenced everywhere in the early warning system that is the artistic imagination. In Canada, Indigenous artists have risen up to paint the doors of Catholic churches with the mournful handprints of murdered children, risen from the graves in those First World internment camps, otherwise known as “residential schools.” Honorific statues of colonizers, queens, and politicians have been torn down, decapitated, their remains thrown into ditches, fields, and waters, their colonial inscriptions overwritten in red paint by the haunting refrain: “We were children.” In the United States, Fox News reports in worried tones the sudden rise of a newly insurgent artistic force, MAGA (Make Art Great Again), that aims to preserve the remaining prototypes of the much touted, never completed, Trump-inspired wall between the USA and Mexico as a form of land art – a monument to right wing populism in ruins that would serve as an entry point for better understanding the relationship between hardened borders, times of political rage, and white nationalism. It seems that when power speaks in the name of death, the artistic imagination is first to the scene, sometimes with the haunting power of melancholic memories, often with the insurgent creativity of psychic simulations of land, politics, and anger.

Nowhere is power under the sign of death visualized with more meticulous rigour and compelling witness than in the research of

Forensic Architecture. In fact, more than bearing witness to scenes of violence, abuse, and murder most savage around the globe, the testamentary productions of Forensic Architecture are a screenshot of power energized by the death-instinct. A new artistic method focused on reconstituting the truth of events by verifying witness testimony, the aesthetics of Forensic Architecture operate at the advanced edge of visual representation. Here, “situated testimony” of murders in cold blood by intelligence operatives on the streets and in secret detention facilities, torture of protesters, systematic abuse of migrants and asylum-seekers, violence against antifascist rappers and LGBTQ activists, shootings by police and soldiers, and mass imprisonments are all painstakingly reconstituted and tested for veracity by deploying the full powers of contemporary imagery: satellite imagery, photo-mapping in 3D, cartography and fluid dynamics, machine learning classifiers, architecture, game software, and photorealistic renderings of 3D images. With this, digital imagery and advanced strategies of visualization are suddenly emancipated from their previous appropriation by established powers, whether corporate or governmental, to become the artistic spearhead of an entirely new way of reconstituting precise evidence for situated testimony. For example, beginning with a social media report concerning “blood flowing from the drain of an unremarkable suburban house in Burundi’s capital,” Forensic Architecture verified the location of the secret torture facility, visually modelled the building’s interior, described torture procedures, identified intelligence operatives involved, and told the story of whippings, beatings, and murder of pro-democracy activists, which the government of Burundi definitely did not want to tell. In Athens, Greece, Forensic Architecture worked on behalf of the family of an antifascist rapper who was murdered by members of the neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn and carefully prepared evidence for a successful court case which, in the end, also raised uncomfortable questions of collaboration by local police. In the Mediterranean Sea, Forensic Architecture compiled evidence from air, water, and land concerning the actions of the Libyan coast guard which, acting on behalf of Italian public officials, are frequently involved in attacking the boats of fleeing migrants in a systematic effort to prevent them from reaching the Island of Lesbos and thus having a landed claim on EU refugee protection laws. For all its moralizing rhetoric concerning social justice, it appears that the European Union has thickened its borders across the Mediterranean in order to prevent new asylum-seekers. But not just torture chambers hidden in the suburbs of Burundi, neo-fascist violence in Athens, and abusive neglect on the shores of the Mediterranean, the projects of Forensic Architecture represent, in their totality, a remarkably intricate

and abject cartography of the global workings of power under the sign of death. Sometimes the visual representations are self-commissioned, but often they are commissioned by a network of important agencies and institutions including Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Médecins sans Frontières, European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, and BBC Africa Eye.

In network society, crime always leaves a digital trace which, when innovative visualization techniques are combined with situated testimony, can finally be brought into real-time visibility appropriate with the digital age. Consequently, this is an activist rendering of the artistic imagination which stresses flows of information to their point of maximal intensity until hidden stories of injustice, abuse, and violence begin to surface from the digital cracks. And digital cracks with their tangible, but until now hidden, evidence of the alliance of power and death are just everywhere these days. Consider the geography of social injustice visualized by the critical artistic productions of Forensic Architecture: **by category** – air strikes, at sea, borders, chemical attacks, detention, disappearance, environmental violence, fire, forensic oceanography, heritage, land rights, migration, police violence; **by methodology** – 3D modelling audio analysis, cartographic regression, data mining, fieldwork, fluid dynamics, geolocation, ground truth, image complex, machine learning, osint (open-source intelligence), pattern analysis, photogrammetry, reenactment, remote sensing, shadow analysis, situated testimony, software development, synchronization, virtual reality; and **by country** – no list is really necessary since the circulation of the death-instinct as the dominant sign of contemporary power finds expression today in almost every nation, trading bloc, and continent. In reality, network society is increasingly linked together by public crime: covered up, denied, obscured, its victims silenced, its perpetrators acquitted, its forensics never pursued, its architecture never imagined, its (digital) traces never tracked – the situated testimony of its victims spurned, debunked, ridiculed, disallowed.

The Empire of Crime

But, that is no surprise. What lies hidden beneath good and evil are the contract killers of the crime scene. The world is obsessed with criminality. Crime is, after all, the code that governs. From the death of Jesus by the Roman state, the death of God, and the death of the president to now multiple assassinations by drones. Media obligingly provide the scenarios: *Crime Scene Investigations*, *Cold Case*, and *Law & Order* where

the mysteries of the universe are reduced to detective scenarios focused on “who did it.” The counterpart of this imaginative aesthetic is the real-life exercise of power by the state and often savage force by police. Yet, for all that, every force field, particle, and wave always has an anti-wave. And that is the aesthetic of Forensic Architecture.

Forensic Architecture enters the quantum zone with a counter amplitude powerful enough to annihilate the sentencing of the state apparatus. Here, a new form of forensic architecture traces the crimes of state and corporate power by means of a virtual reenactment of that point in space/time. Traditional detectives are usually armed with detectors that reconstitute the spent energy and detect breaks in the fabric of the field – shell casings left at the crime scene, a strand of hair, a matching fibre, an alibi that does not match – all of which eventually leads to an authorized police narrative – a policed architecture – explaining what actually happened at the crime scene. Any architectural enclosure that seeks to contain energy, whether churches, prisons, schools, barracks, or military bunkers, supports the stasis of power. Sudden breaks in the space/time continuum, especially by crime, must be not only instantly contained before their seductive violence becomes contagious, but carefully channelled back into a safe reservoir – a media narrative downbeat on crimes but upbeat on solutions, a policed architecture that contains the living energetics of crime for public consumption. And this is precisely where Forensic Architecture appears on the scene. It draws a new map. It disrupts the received order of (criminal)things. It exposes the fault lines of the state, the digital cracks in corporate publicity, the moral injury at the heart of the empire of (state) crime. In effect, Forensic Architecture is the new Crime Stoppers of the twenty-first century, whose artistic energies, riding at the leading edge of advanced technologies of visual detection and representation, reverse the poles of good and evil in much the same way that magnetic fields are reversed in the spinning of the parameters of spatial orbits. The art that emerges from Forensic Architecture are like the brilliantly hued celestial maps produced through quantum astrophysics which have now eclipsed the maps of Kepler and Galileo. But not so much a cosmology as the mapping of the new real where we all know who did the crime.

And, perhaps, something else as well, namely the question of biopolitics. What is its antiwave in this scenario? Until now, power has often been thought in terms of its bodily effects: the cultivation of gendered bodies; the production of schooled minds; the disciplining of the labouring body; social permission granted to a repertoire of bodily gestures, expressions; social permission denied to bodily transgressions prohibited, excluded, outlawed. All this the biopolitics of power speaking in the name of life.

But what happens when the field is reversed, when power actively consorts with death, when criminal enterprise is at the deepest centre of the new real? Forensic architecture has a response. All its artistic projects point to the disappearance of bodies into their digital traces and, with that, the political prohibition of the sovereignty of biology. That is, perhaps, the real crime that is under investigation – living, breathing bodies of the vulnerable, the dispossessed, the exiled, the outlawed suddenly remaindered into data trash for all the world to see. Here are crimes with such ferocity that bodies can only be reconstituted virtually – digital afterimages testifying to the effective disappearance of the sovereignty of individuated bodies. Somewhere in the interstices of pattern analysis, 3D modelling, cartographic regression, and shadow analysis there are intimations, sad but persistent, that what we are really witnessing is a prolegomenon to our own unravelling into an object fit for reconstitution in the language of forensic architecture. That is the real empire of crime.

Or maybe the reverse. If the artistic productions of Forensic Architecture can be so aesthetically innovative, emotionally compelling, and technically original, that is probably because this is a form of art that actually wears the skin of technology, that powers itself up by the data rhetoric of visual technology – pattern analysis, machine learning, photogrammetry, data mining, remote sensing, 3D modelling – and, in so doing, abruptly enters the quantum zone, becoming the leading edge of all the quantum art of the future. Just like the simultaneous presence of waves and particles in the quantum universe, Forensic Architecture is energized by the same elementary tension: waves (cartographic regression) and particles (situated testimony); beautiful computer simulations and primitive acts of violence; fluid dynamics and ground-truthing. This is the aesthetic of fluid dynamics in full flight: bodily suffering and data waves; crimes on the ground and crime detection in the digital atmosphere; times of blood and violence and space filled with its digital traces. What follows is perfectly predictable, but, for that reason, no less noteworthy, namely a forensic art running at the speed of the quantum imaginary with its complex entanglements, fields of data moving at escape velocity, spectral images of the (data) whole (patterns of violence at hardened borders, patterns of police shootings) which reveal brutal truths about individual parts (broken bodies, silenced witnesses), and everything always in constant motion, vibrating, superpositional, like crime detection working in the vocabulary of superstring theory. Which, of course, leads to the inescapable conclusion that art of this order is always itself, even against its own best ethical intentions, complicit in the logic of crime, parasitical of the energies of the death-instinct. If crime is the essence of the new real, if, that is, criminal enterprise plays

its part by energizing the system as a whole, adding the heat of animal spirits to a world that is dying by its lack of energy – its desiccated logic of technological perfectibility – then forensic art contributes to the game of the new real the necessary resistance of the moralized good will. Left to its own devices, a system which is energized by the logic of crime always threatens to spin out of control, to move from the politics of brutal exploitation to the pleasures of abuse value, from politically sanctioned crime with a deliberate purpose to the more radical nihilism of the perfect existential act – senseless but intensely pleasurable violence. Which anticipates, of course, the preservative instinct that is the art of forensic architecture, namely to save the honour of the name (of authority) by inserting the control rods of the morally good will into the chain reaction that is criminal enterprise at the state level. But still, the game continues, probably this time with crime, sensing the power of fluid dynamics, shadow analysis, and data mining, suddenly reversing the field, switching the polarities of the new real, presenting the empire of crime as the suffering subaltern, the alliance of power and death as the morally good way for all life in the future. Hovering over the remains of the day, then, is the key question concerning how to perform a forensic architecture of cynical crime, crime, that is, which slips beyond the bounded space of architecture – cynical crime which, in the end, energizes itself, powers itself up, by the seduction of its own forensics. Is all of art today entangled in the web of predator and parasite? Is Forensic Architecture the art of the “perfect crime?”²²

G Gateways to Blue Stragglers

Consider this meditation on love and death among the stars from *Cosmos*, the *SAO Encyclopedia of Astronomy*:

Blue stragglers are a class of star observed in old, dense stellar systems such as globular clusters. They stand out because old stellar populations are expected to be devoid of blue (high-mass) stars which possess very

22 Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Time*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2008).

short lifespans. The blue stragglers in an old stellar population must therefore have formed long after the system as a whole.

A clue to their origin is that they are only found in *dense* stellar systems, where distances between stars are extremely small (a fraction of a light year). In these dense environments (for example the cores of globular clusters), collisions between stars are relatively common, and it has long been believed that blue stragglers are the result of the merger of two old, red stars. This merger produces a star with a greater mass (hence bluer in colour), and severely disrupts the two stars involved, mixing hydrogen into the stellar core and giving the star a new lease on life.

This model for the formation of blue stragglers was confirmed through observations of the nearby globular cluster, 47 Tucanae, taken with the Hubble Space Telescope. These observations showed that one of the blue stragglers (BSS 19) has a mass almost twice that of the normal stars in the cluster, and an extraordinarily high rotation rate at 75 times faster than that of the Sun. Both the high mass and the rapid rotation of this star bears witness to its origin in a stellar merger event.²³

Tears Bitter like Falling Stars

If you listen carefully on a cold winter's night, you just might hear the sounds of weeping in far distant galaxies with tears bitter and galactic streaking across the sky like falling stars.

Like the rest of us, stars, too, are on the cosmic wheel of life and death, appearing suddenly out of gaseous oblivion, condemned to life with its definite sorrows and often stellar happiness, and, it would seem, very much aware of their impending death in a spectacular extinction-event at the end of (their) stellar time. And again just like the rest of us, stars seem to prepare for death through elaborate mourning rituals in advance, pulled by implacable natural destiny towards the death (their very own) that they are born owing the galaxy, but struggling nonetheless to stay alive for just one more turn on the cosmic wheel of time.

That is the story of what astrophysicists like to call "blue stragglers," brilliantly glowing, rapidly dying stars living their final days in solitude and loneliness far distant from the dense centre of their local galaxy, cut out from the astral herd, swollen up to gigantic mass with the

23 "Blue Stragglers," Cosmos, accessed 23 June 2020, <https://astronomy.swin.edu.au/cosmos/B/Blue+Stragglers>.

weight of passing red stars that they have managed to absorb, moving from the slow and steady rhythm of red-shift on the light spectrum to the wildly accelerated rotations of that sure and certain marker of dying stars with a short lifespan: blue-shift stars glowing brightest in the far outer reaches of their galactic constellations, drifting separately, burning fast their last nuclear fuel, signalling one final astronomical goodbye to the watching Hubble Telescope as they prepare to age into red giants and white dwarfs.

Rebels in the Night-Time Sky

Or something else? Not blue stragglers as a sure and certain time of stars with a short lifespan with the dark immensity of death just bidding its time, but blue stragglers with their fiery brilliance as a beating heart against cold indifference and loneliness across the vast reaches of deep space. Sounds silly, doesn't it? We, the children of scientific detachment and heirs of five hundred years of secular positivism which has worked to strip the universe of its mystery have been taught that the night-time sky has been divested of mythology just as the language of astrophysics has been stripped of the language of cosmology. But for all that we are *matter* – immutable, recalcitrant living matter – and we just know, in our heart of hearts, that even the most material of matter has a poem inside just aching to be get out, to be told, and in that telling to become immortal. So while our vision might be hijacked by scientific indifference, that long poem that is matter just keeps breaking to the surface: sometimes in tea leaves waiting for their interpretation, at other times in the sound of an unexpected visit from a large owl on a tree in the vicinity that usually signals the certainty of someone's death close at hand, or then again in our lingering, atavistic, deep-seated respect for the power of the evil eye and the saving grace of curses well spun, or maybe just our attention, usually involuntary, but close attention nonetheless to the meaning of passing crows in flight: "One crow sorrow / two crows joy / three crows a girl, or maybe a boy." The poetry of matter has a way of tumbling down the wall of imaginations closed, like weeds breaking for sunlight through the concrete. Why not, then, blue stragglers as stars with a beautiful poem of love and death waiting to be told?

We do know this for sure. Every night with the sleeping of the sun, the haze of dusk, and the rising into prominence of darkness, the sheltering night-time sky takes on the comforting form of a funeral shroud. It covers us with solitudes of dead light, ocular ripples from waves of

light from the past, light-year memories of stars that no longer exist, planets expired, brilliant constellations in ruins, a whole impossible history of the rise and fall of galaxies distant, constellations swirling and gaseous starry membranes imploding. Now we are reminded by the words of the astrophysicists above that blue stragglers are themselves formed in the collision of two red stars, and in that forming anticipate a starry fate that will be fiery, short-lived, and turbulent in its brilliant, hydrogen-fuelled brilliance. Like a bonfire to the (galactic) vanities written across the skies of gathering darkness. And we are mindful of the meditations of French writer and philosopher Albert Camus, who died relatively young in a car crash with a copy of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* by his side, but who wrote in advance of his approaching mortality about the necessary absurdity of life, that we demand meaning of the universe and the universe responds with indifference. But we also take careful note that Camus ended one of his classic books, *The Rebel*, with the inspiring ethical admonition: "I rebel, therefore *we* exist."²⁴ Writing in the slaughterhouse of a twentieth century that gave witness to the savage excesses of not one but actually two animating war-spirits – Fascism and Communism – Camus inscribed his poetic knowledge on the violent chaos, namely that absolute reason means absolute irrationality and that demands for absolute justice culminate in absolute murder. If that is the case, why not the same in deep space as well as in the time of earthbound politics? Why shouldn't astronomy's reading of the stars based as it is on faith in absolute science be tempered by the poetry of stellar mythology before absolute (scientific) reason declines into absolute irrationality? Why shouldn't the poetic story that blue stragglers are just aching to tell with their stormy beginnings in the collision of two red stars be thought of in possible terms of a larger astral epic about "I rebel, therefore *we* exist"? After all, there is a real element of fascination associated with two red stars suddenly combining, and in that union predetermining that their fate will be short-lived, violent, and possibly terminal. Now, perhaps what all this implies is limited to a discussion of the cold laws of galactic drift and natural laws of attraction between red stars separate and isolated, but maybe, just maybe, this story of red-star matter, with time passing and its fiery fate self-determined, is something else in addition, perhaps it carries the message of a larger story of love and death tattooed in the night-time sky. After all, these doomed red stars – ageing, stable in their rotations,

24 Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 22.

fixed in their routine orbits – could have gone their separate ways. But something resulted in a sudden, unexpected swerve in their natural pathways. Maybe there is such a thing as love among the stars, the sparkle of mutual attraction in deep space, the adventure of knowing that while as a blue straggler they will never get to enjoy the peaceful, contented decline of slow fade-out that is the natural fate of red stars, they will know something intimate about the intensity of rebellion and existence. Throwing caution to the wind, abandoning stable rotations for fiery burnout, linking their fate with another passing star, two red stars, otherwise condemned to obscurity, rebel against their fate and, in doing so, finally succeed in creating something radically new in the heavens – the brilliance of blue stragglers. And by virtue of the fact that earthbound watchers of the stars observe first and most dramatically the light intensity of blue stragglers, and certainly not the darkness that shrouds the remainder of their constellation, shouldn't it also be said that blue stragglers have finally succeeded in making themselves immortal, that (stellar) love has its own rewards?

We humans already know this story well. We are stardust. It is written in our genes. Like the stars above, we are shadowed by the motions of life as it rises in birth, celebrates the transitory brilliance of its noon-day sun, and sets with finality at the moment of our death. And just like it is written in the stars, we too have known, and known well, the telltale cycles of the rise and fall of energy metabolized into human flesh: from the exuberant energy force field of the very young to the steady-state, red-shift energy of the middle years to the slow, although sometimes abrupt and unpredictable, senescence of energy in the years of our natural eclipse. The mapping of the starry heavens is really just a beautiful astral projection of the human story from rise to decline, just as much as the intense dramas involved in cosmic destiny, with their black holes, white dwarfs, and violent warp holes, give warning in advance of the broken and uncertain odyssey of the human adventure that is an individual's life.

Blue Stragglers of Celebrity

Celebrities are stars of the blue straggler type: glowing brilliantly in the media universe, energies fast-burning, their images widely circulated, their stellar lives attracting intense fascination by surrounding dark masses, their ghostly circulation accelerated by immensities of rumours, gossips, sightings, minutiae, their fame nothing in itself, a fiery centre going supernova, now purely virtual, burning wildly at the nucleic fire of being famous for being famous. And, unlike the rest of us,

true celebrities never really die. Immortal, their fame is always posthumous, just waiting for the physical death of the particular body of flesh and blood which was their temporary, earthly vehicle to finally transcend to their final destiny as blue stragglers: brilliantly luminescent, fiery, gaseous masses within the dark void of the media sky absorbing into their fast burn-rate energy all the passing fuel of human memories, nostalgia, obsession, yearning, fascination, the ecstasy of melancholia. Whether freed to become blue stragglers of celebrity by means of death by suicide, tragedy, murder, drug overdoses, neglect, or excessive indulgence, celebrity, like the stars above, is always the product of unlikely combinations. Like unexpected wrinkles in the fabric of space and time, celebrity is ejected from the regular routines of life, knocked out of its predictable orbit, pushed to virtual prominence beyond the normal cycles of life and death by often unanticipated wrinkles in the media galaxy, achieving transcendence by talent, by opportunism, by beauty, by the sound of a musical rhythm, by the flow of a dancing body, by the scandal of crime serious, by going against the grain politically, economically, culturally, or maybe by going with the grain, but stressing it to its breaking point and beyond. Once invested by the watching, envious, fascinated masses with the charisma of celebrity, stars of the blue straggler type become the newest gods of the media galaxy: self-absorbed, stressed by the immensity of the shining halo of fame that surrounds them, increasingly at ease only with other gods of the media universe, their reputations always on the move, sagging or rising, transcendent or cancelled, their earthly bodies trapped in a fiery contagion, cold flames of fame anticipating their posthumous resurrection as blue stragglers of the cultural imagination. Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis: they wear their fame to a posthumous celebrity life that never really ends like stars brilliant of the blue straggler type; they are all the more luminescent, fascinating, obsessively interesting for the sparkle of death at the centre of celebrity gone cold and thus burning all the brighter.

Blue Straggler Technologies

But now, something else has been added to the space-bound entanglement of human and starry beings, and that is the question of technology. Aggressive, self-assured, and very much aware of its indispensable competencies, it, too, demands its time on the stage of life and death in the unfolding story of starry cosmology. And why not? With its four dimensionality, virtual particles, singularity moments, quantum mechanics, information moving at the speed of light, bodies evacuated

at the speed of data profiling, flowing webs of instant connectivity, and digital sunshine and algorithmic rainstorms, technology mimics the movement of the stars with far more precision, and perhaps with far bolder mindlessness, than its human predecessors. So it should not come as any surprise that given the fast extinction rate of software products, the frequent and instant eclipse of technological platforms, and the sudden disappearance of once popular, to-die-for digital devices, perhaps the overall astronomical rule for technological reality is that every software program, technological platform, and digital device is born a potential blue straggler. Tracing a technological life cycle that has already been coded in celestial logic, digital creations, like everything else, do not, and cannot hope to, ever escape the cycle of natural inevitability: from fantastically innovative, fast mutating energy fields at the very centre of the dense matrix of floating constellations of digital media to orphaned, dying digital stars fading away even at the moment of their greatest brilliance; from software plenitude to the obsolescence of digital senescence, from technological platforms and innovative software which are the life of the (digital) party to blue stragglers suddenly at the periphery of the real action. Swollen to massive proportions by their rapid absorption of all the other red stars, all the other competing technological platforms around them or, as software, carrying around the massive weight of lines and lines of code correcting glitches and random errors gathering along the way, the best fate any technology can aspire to is to assume at the moment of its approaching termination the final honour of glowing brilliantly for a last speck of time in the nighttime digital sky. Not a trashed, superseded dead media, but something very different: a legacy technology which if it has been pushed far out into the recesses of the digital constellation because of its inability to successfully adapt to the very newest virtual innovation still honours the names of its creators by giving off the brilliance of a last glowing ember of its past achievements as it burns off its energy with a final burst of luminosity.

There is certainly no shame in becoming a blue straggler in the digital constellation swirling around our wired heads. Their lasting brilliance puts down markers in the sky concerning where we have come from technologically and what we hope to achieve in the uptight, coded-up future. Everything digital is always in motion: fluid, circulating, swirling, violent. Instant creations. Quick terminations. Fast fade-outs. And everything is swirling around in the dense, hypercompetitive, quickly changing digital matrix at the very centre of things or destined to float away to the deepest far away margins of the vortex: isolated, solitary, lonely. Everybody in the game of digital business life knows this, thus

the violence of the competition, the speed of the cyber-kill, the exuberance of the triumph. Everybody games to be part of the process, not trashed as history; to be a twinkling star in the crushing density of the digital matrix, not to be orphaned as a much admired, but now surpassed, gigantic mass from the past; to be an active data player, not a haunting reminder of where it all went wrong.

Blue Stragglers in the Digital Horizon

Do the stars above experience psychic anguish over their own stellar mortality? Do they spin all the faster in absolute but ultimately futile frustration over their coming disappearance? And if stellar matter does feel, however tentatively, the brush of death on its brightly luminescent surface, does it replicate all the raging resentment that Nietzsche, the philosopher of nihilism, once ascribed to the human condition, namely "let the dead bury the living." Perhaps that is the real lesson to be learned from all the solitary astronomers in their astrophysics labs keeping lonely but faithful vigil with the rising of the darkness. That if blue straggler stars can shine so brilliantly, can be so easily detectable by the Hubble Telescope, while the bulk of their surrounding constellation remains shrouded in astral shade, maybe that is a certain astronomical sign that there is bitter resentment in the fiery hearts of stars as well. That the sheer glow, the massive volume, the superfast spin of blue straggler stars, dwelling at the epicentre of the dense matrix, signals so clearly a last raging shout of triumph on the part of the most ancient of celestial creations against the stellar uprising that is the quickly burning energy of stars still in astral childhood. In this case, let the dead (stars) bury the living. Curious, isn't it? That what has been thought of as a human, all too human foible, namely the entwining of ageing and resentment, may just be an earthly remnant of a galactic sign falling from the constellations above, that what we mistakenly thought of an essential part of the human essence may be just something that long ago broke off from some lonely blue straggler star whirling fast, furious, futile, and bellicose, falling to earth like psychic space debris, but this time, not smashing planet earth off its rotational cycle, not instantly reversing the magnetic poles, not burying itself deep beneath the Yucatán Peninsula or in Hudson's Bay, but metabolizing itself deep in the human spirit. Here, the human cycle would repeat the astronomical cycle, not only in the slow passing of the sun of life from birth to death, but, more poignantly, in the passage of psychic life from a dynamic energy field to the tragic sense of inevitable mortality. And just as there

are many stars which meet their termination point with what seems to be a spirit of reconciliation, or at least of passive acquiescence in the natural playing-out of astral things, the spirit of blue straggler stars that have long been buried deep in human psychic matter may also experience the extremes of bitter raging against the tempest of decline to passive resignation or, perhaps, even a spirit of reconciliation. The poet Dylan Thomas may have been thinking of this paradox surrounding the settling of the wisdom of the stars in earthbound bodies when he wrote about old age raging “against the dying of the light,” anguished at the “closing the day,” rebelling against its certain fate.²⁵

We know that being human often means rebelling against the implacable wheels of time, but does that also apply to our technological creations? Do digital devices, software programs, technological platforms of the blue straggler kind have psychic responses to questions of life and death? The masters of positivism would most certainly respond in the negative. With imaginations limited to the pragmatics of coding, safely cocooned in their comforting illusions by unquestioning belief in the purely object-like, inanimate existence of the products of technology, they are hostile to the immense, opaque penumbra of mythology. But more ancient, perhaps technologically wiser cultures, such as Japan’s, which itself might, in this instance, be thought of as under the sign of the blue straggler, having witnessed the violent eclipse of its own claims to empire by twin blasts of nuclear holocaust, often thinks of technologies in the language of animism – digital devices invested with spirits. Like their human creators, they have no stronger spirit than the joy of life and the sadness of death. Should we anticipate then a future of violent, furious objects of technology – platforms, devices, codes, prosthetics – soon to fade from the passing scene, resisting their eclipse from the sunshine of human attention, resenting their digital replacements, angry to the point of spinning fast, very fast, at their approaching moment of termination? Indeed, will the future increasingly witness digital devices of the blue straggler kind setting cunning ambushes for their human users: Facebook too big as a memory-machine to fail; TikTok too fast, too fluid to slow down; Instagram, too intimate to be estranged; Apple iPhones too intensely personal to be easily abandoned in some coming revolt on behalf of the common distribution of (digital) property; Google’s Androids, too magical to be solely thing-like; many digital devices, gaming consoles, and data feeds too deeply addictive to be given up

25 Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night,” in *Miscellany One* (London: J. Dent & Sons, 1969), 31.

easily in courageous feats of going digital cold turkey. How do you take back your most precious memories from databanks? How do you recapture all those digital footprints that you inadvertently left in the sandy beaches of social media? How do you retrieve the externalized imagination, the exteriorized voice, the ablated image? How really do you reincorporate your digital self, your alienated data shadow, in the flesh and blood of the vulnerable, complicated, body human that you are? The answer seems to be, of course, that you cannot. Which would imply that even in these, the very earliest days of the technological maelstrom, that we are already held hostage to the increasingly digital bodies that we have so rapidly, so smoothly become. Wired memories stored in data archives will always be there to unnerve us; Google searches potential blackmail; recorded cell phone calls a quick fact-check on the imaginary-performance face we may choose that day to show the world; distributed information about our online activities parsed into every more granular data feeds for vast machineries of power, money, and influence. Data possesses us. Information haunts us. Our digital shadow is already showing growing signs of walking out of the shadows to become our real self. Would this mean that we are in eclipse, and our digital selves the newest of the new blue stragglers of the digital universe?

H Hybrid Bodies

Scientists Accidentally Create “Impossible” Hybrid Fish²⁶

It shouldn’t have been possible, but it was: The birth of long-nosed, spiky-finned hybrids of Russian sturgeons and American paddlefish.

Hungarian scientists announced in May in the *Journal Genes* that they had accidentally created a hybrid of the two endangered species which they have dubbed the “sturddlefish.” There are about 100 of the hybrids in captivity now, but scientists have no plans to create more.

26 Stephanie Pappas, “Scientists Accidentally Create ‘Impossible’ Hybrid Fish,” *Live Science*, accessed 22 June 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/impossible-hybrid-fish-created.html>.

"We never wanted to play around with hybridization. It was absolutely unintentional," Attila Mozsar, a senior fellow at the Research Institute for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Hungary, told the *New York Times*.

Cross-breeding across "184 million years of evolution." No problem. Eugenics never sleeps. It is restless, predatory, recombinant, a body invader of the alien kind. First, there was the hybridization of plant life to create new strains of agricultural products for more plentiful, and definitely more profitable, food supplies. Then, as the article above highlights, the hybridization of animal life, in this case "accidentally" creating new species of sturgeons like a madcap biogen experiment gone wild that has managed to escape the confines of the lab, finding its way into the hybrid fish, genetically improved chicken, and drug-dosed meat that constitute dietary life in contemporary consumer culture. Consequently, as biogenetics climbs the steps of the evolutionary ladder from plants and animals, why not the final experiment, namely creating hybrid human bodies by stirring up new biogen compounds in sterilized labs, selecting a human strain in desperate need of some evolutionary improvement, and then skilfully applying what's already been learned in hybridizing new strains of plant and animal species to "accidentally" create a new species of human bodies for the future. The French theorist Paul Virilio once said that the likely consequence of technology smashing into the human condition was a "generalized accident." While Virilio was focused on major changes in human perception as a consequence of accelerated technological culture, this experimental, accidental animal hybridization gets right to the point. It renders an accident not only a species of fish, although that too, but actually renders an accident evolutionary development itself. With one hybrid swipe, it patches together two evolutionary traits separated by 184 million years. With that, what began as a hybrid accident ends up blasting apart the slow pace of evolution, ushering in the radically new reality of recombinant evolution. Recombinant evolution? That's when scientific experiments including genetic sequencing of the human DNA and this experiment in hybridization transform the evolutionary future into experimental versions of mix and match – gene sequencing, animal hybridization, biogen modification, blended bodies of digital culture.

We know that hybrid bodies are coming, and they are coming fast. *Psychologically*, we have already been well prepped. In blockbuster films, the cultural imagination is always fast-forwarding the future of biogen experiments gone off the (human) rails. Consider the following examples of cinema fast-forwarding the visual imagination of the biogen future: *Ex Machina*, *Transcendence*, *Jurassic Park*, *Never Let Me Go*,

Inferno.²⁷ Ethically, ever since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, there has been a steady stream of literature reflecting on the pros and cons of technologically modified human life forms,²⁸ including Greg Bears's *Blood Music* to Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Perceptually, the sheer speed and deeply collaborative world of computer gaming already takes it for granted that the rising generation of the digitally young, the blended generation, has somehow managed to scale up to the speed of hybrid vision with eyes half-flesh/half-data, capable of split second perception, visual decision-making faster than a suddenly popping up screen enemy's high-tech weapon, and fluid, smooth perception that migrates quickly through all the doorways of digital perception built right into the seductive structure of most computer games. Aesthetically, the body with all its wrinkled, drooping skin, worn-out faces, noses tweakable, chin lines dreaming of tautness, and just tired-out features under all the stress and strain of everyday life is just itching for biogen improvements, a big waiting room filled with all the practitioners of the beauty myth, which is just about everyone, waiting to schedule appointments when hybrid body modification becomes available, when skin care products can be delivered the genetic way, and what's best, when the body beautiful can be grown from biogen scratch. And, cerebrally, who could resist the compelling sales pitch of hybrid body products which promise radical improvements in the form of higher IQs, better eyesight, mood modifiers, faces beautiful, age-resistant skin, body shapes modified, and silhouettes striking that will be on offer from the genetic toolbox of the body hybrid. Based on the cultural evidence close to hand from cinema, books, social media, gaming, and cosmetics, the question is not *if*, but *when* will the huge, pent-up demand for the body hybrid be satisfied? The military knows something about this. Turns out that the US armed forces, always on high alert for scientific innovations that can be weaponized, has been conducting a series of visionary experiments over the years focused on the creation of (scientifically) cut and paste soldiers – hybrid soldiers of the future. Live Science reports of extreme experiments run on American combat warriors in order to “make soldiers ‘kill proof’ against all sorts of conditions, including

27 Andrew Maynard, “Films from the Future: Twelve Science Fiction Movies about Technology Trends and Society,” Medium, 25 August 2018, <https://medium.com/films-from-the-future/films-from-the-future-whats-between-the-covers-55872ddaa528>.

28 Tom McCarthy, “Technology and the Novel, from Blake to Ballard,” *Guardian*, 24 July 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jul/24/tom-mccarthy-futurists-novels-technology>.

infectious diseases, chemical, biological and radioactive weapons, altitude extremes and harsh natural conditions."²⁹

We do know this. In the usual way of things, public reservations concerning the profoundly ethical implications surrounding the hybrid body will probably be instantly swept aside by an opportune, perhaps politically engineered, crisis. Just like all those moon shots and the space race of the '60s which were quickly launched in response to potential Soviet hegemony in deep space, the contemporary era will probably witness a new race to the body improved, strengthened, enabled by a competitive challenge, whether real or artifice (it doesn't matter much), from a strategic rival, which in the present circumstances will likely tag China as genetic altering villain of choice. Once a militarized race to strengthened bodies through hybridization takes place, everything else is likely to quickly fall into place. Not Teflon frying pans straight from '60s space technology this time, but Teflon skin brewed up in biogen labs. In this case, perhaps *gynogenesis*, a form of asexual reproduction, is the possible fate of all the hybrid bodies of the future: bodies half-metal/half-flesh, half-data/half-biology; half-drone/half-body. Not just soldiers hardened against dangerous conditions, but future bodies prepped for hybrid warfare in the technological storm. Flexible, non-linear, moving effortlessly between communication at the speed of light and life at the speed of slow matter, always ready to swim in the data stream, eager to slip into the pleasures of bodily ecstasy or thrive in the gap between the real and hyperreal, the hybrid body exists now in full visibility. In fact, it may already be at war with itself, sometimes speeding beyond the inertia of biological matter in order to keep pace with its digital offspring, but, at other times, taking shelter from the storm by going off-grid.

Consequently, the larger question. Long ago we lashed the body to the rocket ship of technology and science and, in fact, went even further by beginning to think of the body itself as a technology which can always, and should, submit to constant routines of self-improvement, upgrading, refinement – the haunting image of the perfect body which, in the impossibility of its actual realization, is as physically elusive as it is psychologically destructive. Of course, bending bodies in the direction of enhanced adaptive capacity has paid incredible dividends: augmented intelligence, connected minds, streamed consciousness, remote

29 Jeremy Hsu, "The 10 Most Outrageous Military Experiments," Live Science, 28 February 2011, <https://www.livescience.com/12991-10-outrageous-military-experiments.html>.

communication, intimacy at a distance, digital devices always close at corporeal hand. In fact, not content with technology remaining on the outside of the body, we are accustomed to breaking ethical barriers separating technology and the body, welcoming digital devices to break the skin barrier, migrating from the outside to the inside of the body – digital bodies tethered to the speed of perception. Now as always, the question remains concerning what happens when digital bodies are forced to live out all the stresses, anxieties, and impossible demands of the illusions of technological perfectibility as the enucleating essence of daily life. Will bodies of the future actually submit to intensifying hybrid experiments? Or will bodies of the future effectively go off-grid, whether physically unable to endure the pressures of technological modification or, perhaps, unwilling to persist in a radically split reality?

I Interference Patterns

In a world in which power is increasingly associated with locked-down political narratives, tight policing regimes, and ubiquitous data surveillance, the act of mourning rises in importance as an interference pattern that disrupts the surface of normality. While power is spatially bound, sometimes extended over territory by control of communication and over bodies by surveillance, mourning is different. It is temporal, not spatial. It is about remembrance, not control. It is often about undoing established political narratives, undermining the boundaries of policing, focusing on that which is always hidden from surveillance – the anguish of sadness, the desolation of loss.

Which is probably why a memorial which we recently witnessed recently to victims of residential schools was so powerful. There was nothing monumental about it. It had no permanence. It had nothing to do with established power. Quite the opposite. Assembled on the steps of Canada's Parliament, it implicitly addressed itself to questions of power and responsibility. It consisted of multiple expressions of grief by Indigenous families, relatives, and friends but also by many non-Indigenous people as well – a visual sea of children's shoes, teddy bears, toys, dolls, clam shells, feathers, faded portraits,

jewellery, rocks with loving inscriptions, poems with comforting words. There was no accompanying music, no ceremonial fanfare, only the silence of the sounds of sorrow. But in that silence and in that altar of spontaneous offerings, there was a clear signal to be heard. Definitely not acoustic, but just as definitely detectable to ears that would hear and to hearts that would open, it was a signal about the emotional ferocity and abiding memory of grief over murdered, abused, neglected, and still missing Indigenous children. Their hidden graves are being discovered at residential schools across Canada; their remains are being brought into visibility by ground-scanning radar; and, in this memorial on the steps of Parliament, their remembrance is being accompanied by demands for ethical accountability. The demands are as simple as they are unanswerable in the present order of things. What kind of political state kidnaps and kills its Indigenous children? What schools have hidden burial grounds for their child students? What kind of power approves the burial of the murdered young under the cover of darkness? What kind of ethics permits the burial of Indigenous children over and over again in an enforced cone of silence that stretches over one hundred years? What kind of cruelty exists that never notifies grieving parents of their loss; and that, to this day, refuses to reveal the official records of death, abuse, and neglect by church and state? What kind of bureaucratic savage combines with equally remorseless priests, nuns, and ministers to turn generations of Indigenous children into objects of abuse, neglect, and death? And, most of all, what are the boundaries of ethical complicity? Is this offering of grief and demand for accountability simply a matter of church and state? Or is the real audience for this memorial still itself missing, still busy driving by, still indifferent, still not convinced that the order of power, whether of church or state, always speaks for *us*, that crimes committed in residential schools distant or near at hand have been perpetuated in *our* name, that the sounds of silence are also about the sounds of general assent. That, after all, is the haunting power of any memorial worthy of the rituals of grieving, that a memorial such as this always marks an ethical breaking point, an interference pattern, a point in time and space that announces what has happened by its offerings of sad memories and, in that offering, demands what *we* will to do about *our* culpability now that bitter truth, still ethically unabsolved, still officially unacknowledged, has finally been unburied, brought into the visibility of consciousness, all tangled up with questions, present and future, of *our own* ethical complicity in murders most savage committed in our name.

Jet Streams of Gravity Waves

A gravitational wave is an invisible (yet incredibly fast) ripple in space. Gravitational waves travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second). These waves squeeze and stretch anything in their path as they pass by.³⁰

The pandemic rages in the streets, the economy is buckling under the stress of the lockdown, political life is paralyzed with its own contradictions, but still, for all that, the effective owners of digital capitalism are eager to step onto the stage of history and do a victory lap while standing on the ruins without and within. The scene is a televised US congressional hearing with capitalism in the witness box or, to be precise, with the leaders of Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Apple, and Facebook called to explain the obvious to bewildered politicians, namely that it is game over, that the analogue economy of industrial smokestacks and manufacturing plants with long-term, secure employment for workers has been obliterated by digital capitalism, and there is absolutely nothing any American politician can do, or, in fact, would want to do, about it. A scene then, of feckless politicians and smug capitalists putting down the financial codes for the twenty-first century. Writing from the bunker that is post-Brexit Britain, the *Guardian* reports as follows:

No question, the “big four” tech companies deserve to be subjected to the closest scrutiny. While none of them has the market dominance that Standard Oil enjoyed at its peak, they all have huge reach. Two of them, Google and Facebook, have no serious rivals.

And they want to keep it that way. The evidence amassed by Congress suggests that whenever Google or Facebook have spotted a potential rival they have used their clout to see them off: sometimes by squeezing firms out of business, sometimes by swallowing them up.

Zuckerberg put up the best defence when he said he had done it the “American way,” starting with nothing and succeeding by offering better products that appealed to consumers. Companies aren’t bad just because they are big, he insisted.³¹

30 “What Is a Gravitational Wave?” Space Place, NASA, updated 4 June 2020, <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/gravitational-waves/en/>.

31 See particularly, Dominic Rushe and Kari Paul, “Too Much Power: Congress Grills Top Tech CEOs in Combative Antitrust Hearings,” *Guardian*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/29/tech-hearings-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-amazon-jeff-bezos-apple-tim-cook-google-sundar-pichai-congress>.

The *Guardian* concludes by putting down the proverbial hammer: “Amazon, Alphabet, ... Apple and Facebook – together with Microsoft – have sailed through the lockdown and now account for getting on for a quarter of the S&P 500 by total market capitalisation.” On the surface then, desolation in the streets of the American plague, but the sounds of business triumphalism in the halls of power, with, in fact, Facebook’s Zuckerberg nicely wrapping the hard reality of global monopoly capitalism in the soft irreality of the flag of American nativism with a pinch of technological pragmatism added. The cynicism of power unchallenged.

Maybe so, but watching that hearing our thoughts kept straying, for some reason, from that hearing room in the power vectors of Washington, DC to the overriding galactic realities of deep space, specifically to gravity waves, those gigantic ripples in deep space first predicted by Albert Einstein and only recently experimentally confirmed. Blasting outward from the spectacular violence of two neutron stars colliding in the dark and cold of constellations distant, gigantic ripples, fast and invisible, travel at the speed of light, distorting, bending, and dimpling the delicate fabric of space/time itself. Nothing stands in their way; their speed is invincible. Obliterating, twisting, distorting everything met on the road of hyperacceleration, nothing, just nothing, remains the same after these gigantic ripples follow their cosmological destiny to larger and larger swelling circles of oblivion. Bred in the heady brew of the special theory of relativity, gravity is a wave with a killer punch. It changes everything with its energy. It leaves nothing as before. It slams hard and fast into the fabric of space/time, reconfiguring its always elastic shape in an instant like, as scientists like say, like a trampoline with a large mass suddenly slamming into it on an otherwise languid summer day. Of course, most humans still seems to slumber unaware in the scientific illusion that is Euclidean space and mechanical time. Here, in Newton’s version of that alphabet of the stars and planets to be read in the night-time sky, gravity was conceived as a force always in slow motion, sort of like a celestial daddy’s “no,” like a constant weight shrouding heavy on things and people, measured by the forces of attraction and repulsion between masses at a distance. Mirrored, in fact, by the gravitational forces between earth and its sky-sister, the moon, which registers in the most faithful language of all – the movement of ocean tides and cycles of the moon – the stability, the dependability of the story of gravitation in our water-blue gem. We know with every footstep that falls solid on mother earth that we are in no imminent danger, unless we chose, by technological, magical means, to shed the sheltering weight of gravity and suddenly float away to spaces unknown without the artificial atmosphere of every astronaut’s survival gear. Like beautiful sleepwalkers slow to get the message, it

does not appear that we have really woke to the news that, after Einstein, that there's a new game in town, that what we took for granted gravity-wise has suddenly gone slippery, uncertain, and indeterminate. In the primal explosion that was Einstein's spectral imagination walking dreamily, thinking cosmologically, through the streets of Zurich in 1915, gravity comes alive, it dances among the stars, it is a gamble of high energy not just a been there/done that story of attraction between masses: it is about mass times velocity, it is about gravity waves moving at the speed of light, it is about the universe reimaged as a cabinet of memories for the consequential results of stellar explosions distant, and it is something intimate, gravity waves moving like unimaginably powerful, fast, gigantic radiating ripples ripping tears, huge bulges, strange distortions, freaky bends in the trampoline-like fabric of our very own space/time. Just everything instantly changes. Space and time flash fuse into space/time. The time of duration dissolves into virtual flows of real time. Space conceived as a measure of physical distance is thrown on the junk-pile of scientific illusions of the past, now unmasked, as we begin to float like sky-riders in the virtual intimacy of network society, where nothing is more intimate than an object distant; every peripheral edge a possible exciting centre of the new; every YouTube video a wormhole to other imaginaries; every TikTok another fun tick of the virtual clock; every Facebook page a therapeutic opportunity, given by the merciful gods of gravity waves, to put on a new virtual face for the day; and every Instagram a possible new bend in the space/time of relationships suddenly emancipated for streaming in the flow.

Outriders of the special theory of relativity: that's the "big four" – Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Apple, and Facebook. Gravity waves masquerading as hardscrabble corporations just wanting to go down the path of the "American way." Many years before, Bill Gates in his premonitory book, *Business at the Speed of Thought*, reflected that in the future corporations would be basically computer programs, with back-end data archives, front-end service workers, and the expertise of technicians in-between. That was insightful, but as it turns out fundamentally flawed for these big four. Gravity waves are definitely not computer programs. They are morphological changes of state in the very fabric of space/time. They create new universes of meaning, alternative universes, running parallel to the social discard left standing on the ground, always distorting space/time in the direction of their violent velocity. Like an airborne tsunami from outer (digital) space, the Amazon wave leaves retail shops abandoned, service workers suddenly de-skilled, traditional commerce derailed, confused, and bewildered just about everywhere in the wreckage of its tidal wake. Apple prides itself

on bending space/time in the direction of a new technological aesthetic, with its innovative iPhone taking advantage of things melting together – phones, compasses, maps, photographs, videos, apps practical and divine – in a space/time fabric where everything far is close again, and every voice, gesture, and memory just animating, energizing fuel for growing new cyber-ears. Facebook is what is left of social relationships after the death of the social, similar to what the MIT psychologist, Sherry Turkle, has described as “alone together,” but not really. Bodies biological might be stranded high and dry, all alone, in Euclidean space, but Facebook bodies have already gone over to the other side, riding the gravity wave of data at the speed of light to virtual communities of interest, virtual friendships, virtual bonding. Perhaps just checking in, keeping track of good friends, casual acquaintances, definitely of friendships gone sour, all travelling along those strange new vectors with people of the Facebook tribe (1.93 billion daily users but starting to decline) making of their own *physical* lives instantly reportable, mostly staged road stories on the arc of biology from birth to death, but also *virtual* presences putting on the mask to the stars that is Facebook, a placeless place where bodies with their memories special and friendships tagged never really have to die, where nobody in the end has to actually leave the magical wall. Alphabet/Google has rewritten the alphabet of digital life in sectors multiple. Its fabled search engine, the key to the long sought universal library; its ownership of YouTube, a monopoly over machine vision and, with it, a good chunk of the always fabulous human visual imagination; its algorithms, a revolutionary change of state for all really existing advertising practices. Riders of the gravity wave that is the special theory of relativity now practically realized by its very own “killer app” of digital reality, the “big four” virtual visionaries above are beautiful technological clichés. As Marshall McLuhan predicted long ago, whoever provides machines with the gift of life or, in the present circumstance, whoever provides gravity as a high-energy wave with a practical means of realization, a way, that is, for everyone to tap into the stellar energy flow, to sparkle in this new dance with the stars that is a gravity wave slamming into the fabric of space/time, will be rewarded with immense flows of wealth. We are living in the early days of a high-energy technological blast that is the fabric of the new real. We are the illusion that Einstein only dreamed.

Gravity waves must circulate or die; the rest position is death. Each gravity wave moves at the speed of light by virtue of being digital. Each wave moves invisibly in the form of algorithms, network logic, and distributive consciousness. Which was why, in the end, the congressional hearing on digital monopoly appeared to have all the pathos of

a pantomime for the disappearing masses. The (virtual) dealer is at the table, the cards have been dealt, the fix is in, and everybody at the table knew it. Definitely the new “emperors” of digital capitalism but you could also just see the pathos on the faces of all those latter-day politicians still stuck in election cycles – short, fixed, and immutable – asking questions meaningless given the virtual circumstance and receiving responses that barely managed to honour the rhetorical traditions of a now despondent and lost American way. A shadow circus.

But still, the problem remains. How do you regulate a gravity wave? How do you mend a tear in the fabric of space/time? Perhaps you don't. After all, we are dealing here with global, digital corporations that have mutated into elemental life forces, energizing forces of nature raw, primitive, and fast, very fast. Flows of light, swirls of virtual particles, radiating outward, circulating everywhere, altering consciousness, mapping emotions, consciousness distributive, memory always retrievable, knowledge deeply layered, vision moving effortlessly along many very different ocular tracks, ears fast-sequencers of sound, dissolving the commodity-form itself into virtual exchange-value with money transformed into virtual particles following fast vectors anonymous across the financial markets of the world. Everything considered important now is virtual. The public debt of nation-states has been launched into deep orbit on the wings of virtual credit, looping and circling in endless cycles hopefully never to crash to earth again. Video games jump out of their boxes straight into the governing logic of war games and high-finance gaming strategies alike. Business, politics, entertainment: all at the speed of life rippling, tearing, bending, imploding in the gravity wave that is digital reality.

But here's the rub. We have seen gravity waves come and go before. Some we have experienced politically in the predigital era, if not in person at least by books and spoken records: the Russian Revolution of 1917, the American Revolution, the American Civil War (that still is unresolved to this day), dreams of the lost caliphate that was ISIS, the stellar implosion of the Soviet Union, the fabled struggles of the French Revolution, gravity waves large and small that just suddenly and without warning bent things out of shape in all those city-histories of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem. And if we have not known gravity waves through the books of power won and lost, we have certainly known them in our hearts: the advent of the long-awaited messiah, Jesus, the prophets of the Old Testament, the altered consciousness of the passionately converted that is the great religions: Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism. Our planet ancient has somehow managed to survive stellar storm clouds rising in day-time skies, flares burning in

the night of wilderness like lightning-flashes gone wild in distant horizons. And by our earthly genetics, we have long been accustomed to living in those wild ripples of space/time, sometimes torn wide open by political revolution, at other times by the intensity of religious belief or even, as is our contemporary circumstance, by the power of scientific illusion. We are children born to ride the waves, to jump head-first without cautionary heed into any passing ripple; we know the nausea, but we also love the pleasure; we are always dancers of the stars with light waves in our dreams. You can see it clearly everywhere: it's the rapture wildness of heavy metal cutting across a city scene slumbering in the heat of the night; it's the financial market that goes straight up when, by any measure, it should be falling like a wailing stone; it's the story told by video, book, film, or podcast that just takes you suddenly to places special, to thoughts unthought, to imaginaries unimagined. It's that dancing spark of a love story between people who should not have anything in common, don't seem to have anything in common, but have some strange spirit-passion that time-travels through the differences, meeting at a lovely bend in the folding forever together of their very own fabric of space/time. It's that comment made in passing, the expression on another's face, a meeting unanticipated, or maybe just something happening that puzzles and bemuses, but still, for all that, is very much a gravity wave rippling across the membranes of our life, changing everything, dividing past from future, taking us down, deep down, with expectations joyful, but always mindful, of sorrows sure to come. All this to say, we know, we *really* know, gravity waves. We have heard the sounds of constellations crashing, exploding in our own bodily versions of the Milky Way. We know by hard-earned thumps of a beating heart all the ecstasy and desolation of sudden shifts of states of body and that soul, we now call a mind: a lover's betrayal, friendships broken, a relationship fast dissolving, marriage breakdowns, a position unjustly not gained, a cherished goal not achieved, a child without memories fond, a parent's love gone cold, an affair passionately sensual that takes you completely by surprise. Long before science came to the table of life, we had already learned as a species our lessons from the stars. It is written in our bodies; it is engraved in our minds; it ripples in our imaginations; it is that sparkle daring in our eyes; it is that beat-beat of an always gambling human heart taking a chance at the wheel of fortune in the game called life.

Now we mention this because in the midst of all the wealth and the fame, in the spectacular fast track that is the hustle and bustle of the newly appointed four "emperors" of the new real or, as we would prefer to think of them, the very newest pagan gods presiding over the

digital way, they do not seem to have realized that like gods of old before them their destiny is mythic, and that the story of myth is usually not a happy one. Fate radiates without reason, gods squabble, divinities deeply resent privileges seized by or granted to another god at the table of the (digital) Olympus; gods bored with the sumptuousness of the feast throw down lightning bolts capricious on adoring crowds gathering below, perhaps as an idle amusement just to see what will happen; gods are spiteful, sometimes mean-spirited, and they have rancour as much as joy in their heart of hearts; gods are even confused on occasion, mixing up wisdom with folly, the coolness of cool, clear thought with the fickleness of chance. So, as with the old gods of capricious fate, the chalice of good fortune is passed now to our new digital divines, lounging around tables of fabulous wealth, perhaps smug and thus inviting nemesis, sometimes, as with Zuckerberg's reflections on the seize-the-moment reality of the American (commercial) way, telling it like it is, or as with the other gods – or should we say, owners of four major technological platform – capably playing the long game, not really revealing the secret of secrets, always keeping carefully within the rhetoric of the doleful but admiring chorus of the losers. Gods being gods always consider their divine status justly earned with the expectation, cautious but confident nonetheless, that there's some unspoken guarantee of duration to their reign as the newest pagan divinity at the game.

Now, it is certainly not the usual practice of political theorists like ourselves to give advice to divinity, for, that is, one of the faceless digital crowd below to shout out a warning to the gods, but something tells us that these new masters of the digital Olympus are in desperate need of the guiding alphabet of mythology. If they were to put down their business manuals earnest and cutting edge for just a moment and take up Homer's *Odyssey* and *The Iliad* or the Greek poetic tragedies as their trusty map-makers to the future, they just might see that the history of mythology is filled with the madness of the furies, the gods of angry nemesis, the riddles of the Sphinx, the appearance of one-eyed monsters of the deep, shape-shifters luring passing sailors onto rocks and reefs of crashing doom, that nothing is as fickle as good fortune, that the best will be last, that stability present is a gateway to ruins, that the odyssey never really ends, that stronger and better challengers to the ring of divinity are already banging at the door. That said, the epitaph lasting of this congressional hearing on the new "emperors" of the digital economy might read that these four newly appointed divines, these rising Odysseuses of the new American way, really have their (mythological) work cut out for them. Living on an older than old planet and inhabiting a country that as the novelist William Burroughs once called

ancient, very ancient, before even the coming of the Indigenous, the four divines are most similar to the vernacular of the American innocent abroad. Graduates of prestigious universities, wearing prep school clothes straight from the warehouse of the spirit of pragmatism, with its boy-scout optimism and get-ahead, almost messianic, enthusiasm, they have drunk deeply at the well of the American entrepreneurial spirit, with its faith in the pragmatics involved in the feverish enhancement of adaptive enhancement, the adoption always of an experimental attitude and, most of all, that most pragmatic of all habits – always looking for the killer business app that would instantly convert scientific genius into unparalleled opportunities for material gain.

It's all there: the pragmatism of the settlers of the wilderness with their axes and Bibles close at hand; the constant creaking of those wagon trains following trails adventuresome and dangerous to the western skies of the American dream; the space shot, Challenger, chasing the talisman of the very same American dream, but this time at the new frontier of the celestials, when suddenly something goes terribly wrong; the meditations of very different American thinkers, philosophers reflective, technologists confident, commentators of sports analytical in their deliberations, financial analysts always searching out new companies at the breaking edge of the enhancement of adaptive (technological) capacity; an entire political system, the American Republic, constructed systematically on that most pragmatic of all political premises: hope for the best, but plan for the worse. These, the new masters of the digital universe, follow faithfully in that pragmatic spirit. Abjuring the solidity of hardware and not really beholden, for all their rhetoric, to the technical details of software, they are diviners of *wetware*. Their spectacularly novel, and as it turns out, timely business innovations got their hardscrabble start in the ripple where the sudden appearance of a new *form* (digital reality) meets old *content* (analogue reality). Their quick elevation to the digital divine owes everything to that magic gleam of pragmatism in their hearts: Amazon, Alphabet (Google), Facebook, and Apple creating new digital bridges to digital delirium, exiting the dead, quickly surpassed scene of analogue remainders. Of course, like gods of old, but this time limited for sure by the blinders necessary of pragmatism, these newly minted gods do not seem to realize that they are probably temporary visitors to the scene, that there are other players with better game, other gods of speed, banging at the doors.

That is the contemporary story of Huawei and TikTok: early warnings signals that American cyberprowess fuelled by the spirit of pragmatism has already fallen behind the speed of the Chinese technological imaginary. Today, as everyone knows with joy or regret, speed is power.

Consequently, the newest of the new American gods do what other pagan gods have probably done before them, namely when threatened appeal to a higher power. In this case, the American divines take sudden shelter behind the beleaguered walls of an American government that they imagined they had left long behind, trying to stop Huawei with physical arrests to prevent the adoption of Chinese 5G technology as the new world standard; with respect to TikTok, Microsoft and the American president have played the old game of good cop/bad cop with their common Chinese adversaries. In the end, it will not really matter. Gravity waves are not particularly known for their loyalty. Ripples have no permanence. Speed has no friends. Riders of the gravity wave can be bucked off in an instant; anyone can get lost at the bends of digital real time; lost in the distortions of digital real-space; crushed by the (data) dimples. Perhaps what we were actually witness to at these congressional hearings were the first tentative sounds of the quick decline of American empire and the rise of the Chinese imaginary as the new Alphabet (Google), Facebook, Apple, and Amazons of the twenty-first century.

What the gods of fate give, the gods of fickle caprice can always take away. Indifferent to our demands, gravity waves move like a hard wind across a prairie field abandoned, a fast, galactic rustle through the trees, an explosion unexpected rippling in its blast the elementary materials deepest of life itself. So, whether gods or common folk, we can ride a gravity wave, but should never expect to own it. We can be its beneficiary but can never chain the daemon of its soulless soul.

K Kinetics of Atrocity

“Philosophy of the Heart”

Sometimes in thought as in life, reflections on national philosophy provide lucid clarity about the contemporary public situation. That is certainly true about Ukraine. From the shadowland of the past, there arises now into greater visibility the comment by Dmytro Chyzhevsky that the essence of Ukraine’s national philosophy was romanticism, a “philosophy of the heart,” which, refusing to reduce human beings to pure rationality or pure materialism, thought of individuals as beautiful “microcosms” – singular



Figure 22. Photo Credit: Lynn Baron

mixtures of many wonderfully complicated streams of emotions, thoughts, actions with vibrant souls, psyches deeply entangled, fluid, dynamic.³² And what could be more an agonizing philosophy of the heart than Ukraine today: traumatized refugees, terrified children, civilian soldiers at the edge of death, women giving birth in bomb shelters, random blasts of cruise missiles, targeted blasts of long-distance artillery, skies flaming with danger, water poisoned, earth trembling, air filled with desperation, sorrow, anger. This is a land of blue skies and yellow fields which has a collective aching heart: heart-broken over the timidity of Western societies in the face of Russian aggression, war crimes, deliberate massacres of civilians, and targeted assaults from the air directed against hospitals, theatres, food warehouses, just about anywhere the precarious, vulnerable, and defenceless are to be found. But also hearts bursting with the energy of stubborn, implacable, persistent resistance against the violence of absolute autocracy. There is more than pure reason at play here. And certainly more than pure materialism since almost everything standing has been vaporized by bomb blasts. It is as if Ukraine as a collective society has singlehandedly remapped the politics of the new world order. Refusing

32 Taras Zakydalsky, "Chyzhevsky as a Historian of Ukrainian Philosophy," DiText International, paper presented at the University of Illinois, 2003, <http://www.ditext.com/zakydalsky/chyzhevsky.html>.

the pure absolutism of the increasingly closed, isolated world of Russian autocracy and, with passionate intensity, giving the lie to the limited war game rationality of NATO planners, Ukraine has done the impossible in the harshest of circumstances. It has foregrounded the sparkling brilliance and singular charisma of a society that translates the philosophy of the heart from philosophical literature into popular resistance. And why not just say it? In Ukraine's politics of street warfare, in the strength and skill of its popular army, in the palpable anger of its refugees, in the torment of those left behind in bomb shelters and watery trenches, the romanticism of hope is in the air. You can just see hope waving in all those crowds of flags. You can just hear it in the measured timbre of President Zelenskyy's daily words. You can just feel it in the refusal of the residents of bombed cities, villages on fire, soldiers fighting day and night to not let Russian aggression have an easy pass. You can just hear it in the sounds of music in the deserted streets, the flow of poetic words describing bleakness but also waiting for resurgence, in the rasp of farmers' voices as they tow away yet another abandoned tank, in the hope of front-line soldiers' voices as they claim another hard-fought victory. In the hardest of hard circumstances, Ukraine today is the romanticism of democracy itself: the impossible dream of sustaining a democratic community in a world harsh and cruel; the beautiful will to protect democracy against autocracy and, in that hard-won protective space, to bring alive again other democratic dreams – Paris Commune, Spanish Revolution, Allende's Chile – that were assassinated by absolute power. In retrospect, everything now in the twenty-first century has been a waiting time, waiting for an epochal event that will finally give contemporary history its guiding direction home. That's Ukraine now. Its fateful struggle against Russian autocracy, its defence of democracy in a beautiful country on the eastern frontier of the European community, its readiness to take up arms, to mobilize its citizenry, to fight with bravery, intelligence, and agility all draw into sharp visibility something radically new in the world – the philosophy of the heart at the very heart of events, the fabulous courage of romantic dreams of hope in hopeless times, with Ukraine itself as a microcosm of a very different international order – democracy, solidarity, courage, compassion, creativity. Here, the trajectory of contemporary history turns, the gods of time sense that something profoundly new is happening in this country of yellow and blue, citizens everywhere in the connected world have their own philosophy of the heart, their own deepest emotions shaped by what's happening on the streets of Ukraine, and, in fact, the trajectory of the twenty-first century itself has its steady-state narrative of positivistic reason and absolutist power undermined, if not fatally damaged, by the insurgency of the romanticism of hope and despair that is Ukraine. It is a microcosm of terror from the skies, but also of hope from the philosophy of (Ukrainian) hearts.

Ukraine as the Twenty-First Century Quantum Event

Black holes are some of the most enigmatic objects in the Universe, harboring intense magnetic fields and colossal gravitational forces that even light cannot escape. A black hole becomes visible to astronomers when its encircling plasma falls inward, causing this ionized gas to heat up and emit radiation.³³

Not all black holes are stationary in the centres of galaxies: some wander the universe, and when they approach their “colossal gravitational forces” swallow everything in their path. That’s Ukraine today – a huge, swirling vortex that crushes everything with its strong gravitational force, that attracts all passing events, objects, attention through its haunting magnetism, that quickly spreads a gathering darkness from which no light can escape, that changes the trajectory of contemporary social history, that shatters individual biographies of those trapped in its fatal energies, that reduces the architecture of lives, buildings, and cities to the rubble of highly compressed fragmentary remainder. Ukraine is a black hole whose force field of uncertainty and indeterminacy pulls, twists, and remixes all the established political narratives of the twenty-first century: nostalgic Russian dreams of empires lost and gained, NATO’s war game that involves avoiding nuclear warfare with Russia while aiding Ukrainian resistance, Ukrainian struggles for political independence, democratic governance, and individual dignity, and the European Union’s ambivalence about its eastern frontier. Ukraine is the twenty-first century’s first major quantum event – the first significant political event, that is, that releases the power of the vortex into contemporary human affairs with violence as its energy accelerator, the magnetic fascination of social media as its force field, and the colossal power of its immense gravitational forces simultaneously crushing things at the centre and wildly reconfiguring received narratives about past and future. But it is more than that: as the space of Ukraine is swept up in the vortex of the black hole we enter the multiverse, appearing in a new world, a new stellar system that radiates out from the depths of destruction. As Putin’s Russia is swiftly reduced by the kinetics of (his) atrocities disappearing into the blackness of a dwarf star – a dead star – one can see the brightness of the emergent Ukraine.

Here, traditional international relations are scrambled; globalization is in ruins; the pandemic (almost) forgotten; political alliances confused; refugees in the millions on the run looking for shelter; children traumatized,

33 Gregory Howes, “Illuminating Black Holes through Turbulent Heating,” *Physics*, 14 February 2022, <https://physics.aps.org/articles/v15/20#:~:text=Black>.

scared, and haunted; women raped, kidnapped, and terrorized; soldiers young and old, murdered and mutilated; political leaders full of bluster; Russian nationalism imploding; Ukrainian resistance resurgent; traditional tank warfare vaporized by portable Javelin missiles with lessons concerning how to be a one-person tank killer freely available on YouTube; fast-streaking jets the target of choice for Stinger missiles and, better yet, S-300 missiles; lumbering helicopters always only a sudden fiery explosion away; Switchblade drones hunting highly vulnerable fuel trucks and troop carriers; President Zelenskyy at the steering-wheel of history, President Putin cast by the West as the embodiment of the evil empire, President Biden taking to speaking the street language of moral outrage. What's this, then, but a pure quantum event: entangled, fluid, with events unfolding at high velocity; media commentaries migrating virtually across the globe; social media streaming intimate portraits of war; questions of good and evil suddenly ambiguous in detail and definition; fixed binaries quickly changing polarities; established narratives suddenly liquid, mobile, fluctuating; the past eclipsed, the present uncertain, the future indeterminate; and, of course, all this emotionally charged by the tangible possibility that this, until now, strictly limited regional form of warfare can mutate at the speed of uncontrolled political passion into global nuclear warfare. Ukraine today, the world tomorrow?

Violent Event Horizon

Vectors of violence are everywhere in Ukraine: savage, random, cruel, mesmerizing. That's what violence does. It creates a powerful event horizon separating past from future, ordinary life from life at the extremes. Magnify violence by the power of streaming services and television cameras and the results are global waves of psychic turbulence, moral outrage, and political grievances looking for ways to vent themselves. Scenes of violence – artillery explosions, gunfire, and bombs; death by knives, chemicals, and fires – have the effect of blasting apart long-established routines of life into highly charged social particles scattering at random. Nothing is spared, intensity everywhere, random fate the name of the game, terminal exit written on every street sign, mortal wounds bleeding out in shops, apartments, schools, churches, and shelters, the fabric of individual life crumpled, torn, floating away on the prevailing wind. Like the heat blast of a forest fire out of control, vectors of violence quickly multiply their destructive effects, obliterating streets, melting flesh, disappearing bodies, exterminating animals, and churning urban architecture into vast, empty zones of desolation.

The result is the kinetics of atrocity. Every street a potential barricade, every individual a possible soldier, every unknown person an enemy suspect, every captive a potential target of abuse, every object close at hand – bricks, stones, shattered glass – a convenient weapon, every day a matter of survival, every night a time of watchfulness, every rising of the sun a miracle. The kinetics of atrocity are definitely animated by motion. Certainly the kinetic energy between humans and machines: lone (Javelin-equipped) warriors stalking tanks, fighter pilots evading surface-to-air missiles, packs of soldiers silently waiting in ambush for passing armoured caravans, solitary drones scouting targets for long-range artillery strikes, swarms of drones drifting through the evening air looking for targets of opportunity, crowds of people protesting military occupation, forces of occupation announcing the beginning of a new (Russian) reality to terrorized citizens at the point of a gun. Here, it's all about survival games for powerful war machines.

But not only that. The kinetics of atrocity can be so powerful because the form of kinetic energy at stake in this war has less to do with mechanical machines than with something else, something deeply libidinal, distinctly psychic, something invisible, tangible, insistent. It can be seen everywhere. A courageous woman in St. Petersburg drenches herself with red paint as a sign of political resistance to the “special military action.” A resolute young woman is arrested by security forces for the crime of standing silently holding in her hands a blank sheet of paper. A lone cellist in Kyiv plays a haunting musical composition in a deserted urban square blasted by shelling and framed by the ruins of a bombed apartment building. No longer able to perform in concert halls, the national Ukrainian symphony takes to the underground, playing beautiful compositions for people huddled in repurposed subway bomb shelters. Ukrainian visual artists paint searing images of love, hope, and solidarity in chaotic times on the virtual walls of global social media as well as on the shattered walls of encircled cities. Many people, blue-collar workers, artists, and professionals, leave normal life behind for precarious life in the trenches and barricades. An army of international soldiers volunteer for possible death and mutilation on the streets of Ukrainian cities, in forests and fields of active combat. Everywhere the world is watching. Everywhere the world is implicated in the question of Ukraine.

Seemingly everywhere, a kinetics of political solidarity in the midst of growing atrocities, courage in the violent storm migrating from individual to individual like stubborn spring flowers somehow breaking through the hardness of hard roads. Solitary individuals with a song of bravery in their hearts painting, dancing, playing, writing, sculpting, poeming, and graffitiing their way to the resurgence of hope. Definitely

libidinal, this is a form of protest that breaks with the isolation of human solitude, repeating in practice what Albert Camus wrote in *The Rebel*, “I rebel, therefore *we* exist.” And it is just as definitely psychic, since this flowering of the art of courage which is the essence of Ukrainian resistance today is the first awakening sign of nervous systems linked to a new form of a global collective unconscious, that daring refusal of compassionate hearts and attentive minds to quietly abide by the rules of the atrocity museum. And with that, the kinetic energy generated by strong emotions, adamant refusals, and equally invincible moral convictions spreads its wings across the global human spectrum, speaking directly and insistently to the need to give public witness in a time of cruelty.

Like a spark in desert-dry summer grass, cruelty streams through social media, its political barbarism transforming individuals with a screen interface in the direction of moral culpability. That’s what kinetic energy is really all about. Broadcast everywhere as blood reports from life in the (Ukrainian) wires, reported constantly by Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube, war in the era of social media culminates in a loss of innocence for an otherwise distracted planetary audience. Here, witnessing is also choosing. Remaining in the suspended animation of active denial or making an intensely personal decision in favour of ethical responsibility? With this, the kinetic flows of energy from the battlefields of Ukraine enter the solitude of individual lives on a global scale, shaping a new form of ethical commitment fit for the now fully connected world in which consciousness of much is finally linked to the ability, individually and collectively, to do something about it. The tangible signs of this new form of ethics for a connected world are seemingly everywhere: massive protests in hundreds of cities around the world; mass movements of money, medical equipment, arms, and international brigades in support of Ukrainian insurgency; inspiring cultural events in London, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles all focused on making of artistic expression a way of resisting absolute autocracy; and, most of all, of course, the admirable generosity of the front-line citizens of Poland, Romania, Germany, Hungary, and Moldavia in providing dwelling places for traumatized and impoverished refugees fleeing violence. With a song of bravery in their heart of hearts, individuals from many countries, near or distant, are definitely giving voice to universal ethical solidarity in a time of bitter, capricious cruelty.

Fascism Resurgent: Eurasian Ideology Smashes and Tumbles in Ukraine

Or perhaps, something else? The conflict can be so pitiless, cruel, and unforgiving because it opens up an abyss between two clashing passions

of the heart. Certainly the passionate intensity of Ukrainian resistance as its mobilized citizenry confronts the Russian colossus, but also something very primal to Russian nationalism – Eurasian ideology.³⁴ First articulated in the immediate aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution, long suppressed and held dormant in the twilight years of the Soviet regime, Eurasian ideology – the deeply messianic belief that Russia has a special destiny as midpoint, a third way, between Europe and Asian – springs fully developed from the historical imagination of President Putin.

Often acclaimed by contemporary Russian nationalists as the long-awaited messiah of the third way, Putin is in a political position to do something about it. You can just catch its drift in Putin's remarkably detailed, indeed meticulous analysis of the historically necessary union of Russia and Ukraine,³⁵ an analysis that ranges over one thousand years of political history beginning with Kyiv as the original centre of the founding spirit of the Rus tribe. But now, in his estimation, Ukraine has been politically hijacked by Euro-Atlantic imperial elites, with Ukrainians themselves increasingly seduced by the high-consumption markets of the West and the Ukrainian military itself depicted as providing cover for fascist fighters. In this messianic cosmology, Russian aggression against Ukraine is viewed less a military conquest than a strictly dialectical exercise in correcting the contemporary trajectory of Ukrainian history. In Putin's vision, Ukraine must be returned, even against its will, to its autochthonous origins as a people of the Rus which, together with Russian and Belarus, would then comprise a highly distinctive world civilization in its own right. In this vision, only a Eurasian union would provide effective resistance against the corrosive danger of liberal democracy with its toxic combination of democratic institutions and market-driven liberalism.

Everything follows from this: authoritarian rule in Russia as the state-orchestrated fulfilment of messianic destiny; active ideological collaboration between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state; surveillance, imprisonment, and liquidation of political opponents targeted as potential carriers of viral (political) infection from the Euro-Atlantic West; a litany of grievances against the eastward expansion of

34 Preet. D. Das, "Foundation and Evolution of Eurasian Ideology," *Indian Journal of Russian Studies*, no. 1 (2019), http://ijrs.online/ijrs/images/articles/Foundation_and_Evolution_of_Eurasian_Ideology.pdf. See also, T.S. Tsonchev, "The Kremlin's New Ideology," *The Montréal Review*, January 2017, <https://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/The-Ideology-of-Vladimir-Putin-Regime.php>.

35 Vladimir Putin, "On the Historical Unity of Russia and Ukraine," *The Saker*, 13 July 2021, <https://thesaker.is/article-by-vladimir-putin-on-the-historical-unity-of-russians-and-ukrainians/>.

NATO in the post-Cold War period; very real resentment against short-sighted and triumphal Western gloating at the end of the Cold War with its accompanying impoverishment of Russian citizens and humiliation of its political, military, and economic leadership; and, most definitely, the domestic subordination of purely economic interests in Russia to the eschatological vision of Russia as a messianic third way between Asia and societies of the Atlantic. Here, neither rational self-interest nor survival instincts will be permitted to put a brake on messianic political visions.

The result is not only a classic “clash of civilizations,” but something even more intense, a struggle to the death between two bitterly opposed philosophes of the heart: one openly transcendent towards a new European future; the other closed, resentful, cheated, picking at the scabs of its wounded pride; the first communitarian, democratic, and (hopefully) merciful; the second autocratic, authoritarian, and definitely merciless. When passionate intensities of this order meet on the field of battle, it is a war of absolutes – apocalyptic destruction or victory through blood, sweat, and (many) tears. Which is, of course, tempered on the Ukrainian side by the unspoken strategy of the US-led NATO to make this a long, slow war of attrition, with no clear victory or certain defeat for either side, but only a prolonged bleeding of Russian strength both on the battlefield as well as in the only war zone that really counts for capitalist societies – trade sanctions intended to create economic crisis in the Russian homeland. Consequently, the escalation of the new battlefield of cyber warfare into what may very well turn out to be the Quantum perpetual war.

On paper, the dialectics of the war seemed so very clear: Russia (thesis) versus Ukraine (antithesis) with Eurasian union (synthesis) as the desired (Putin) outcome. However, when purely hallucinatory ideologies fall from the sky of cosmology into the heavy gravitational pressure of real time earthly events, the beautiful chaos of uncertainty, confusion, and indeterminacy is the usual result. In this case, that’s Eurasian ideology smashed, crumpled, and tumbling down the rocky cliff of Ukrainian resistance. Here, the purely *theoretical* vision of Eurasian ideology with its sense of messianic destiny and its self-proclaimed political Messiah confronts the unexpected: the immense, tightly fused unity of Ukrainian national resistance energized by a collective philosophy of the heart, the rise into global prominence of President Zelenskyy as an inspiring world-historical figure reading the tea leaves of politics, strategy, and tactics in the shadow of the (military) whirlwind; the cold, ruthless, but highly effective, war strategy of the United States to fight the war, at one remove, equipping

Ukraine's military with advanced weaponry, but otherwise limited support and certainly no American soldiers bleeding out on the front lines. In essence, a proxy war waged between Euro-Atlantic societies against the attempted rise of the Eurasian union, with the fate of Ukraine in the balance. And there's something else as well which spins all the best-laid (Eurasian ideology) schemes into data dust and strange vectors, and that this is the very first of all future wars. This is war in the age of social media.

The Global Soul: War in the Age of Social Media

That's decisive. War in the age of social media is where the wheels come off political cosmology, putative Messiahs bite the dust, Davids actually do put a big, fatal hit on towering Goliaths, and the best-laid schemes of strategic war planners are always at the mercy of the next media feed. Here, what's at stake is not only the battle for mass perception, but something much more precious, namely the struggle for the *global soul*. Now we know that in this strictly secular age when god has supposedly died in human hearts that soul talk is a no go zone. But that is nonsense since it flies in the face of a greater digital truth, namely that the age of social media actually crystallizes something very similar to what the French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin once described as the "noosphere" – a planetary "mind sphere" brought into existence through technology, quickly evolving into a new Omega Point with the potential unity of the human species only a social media stream away. Sounds just about right for an age of externalized human consciousness with buds for ears, screens for eyes, and surfing for whiling away the hours; and synchronized human emotions where the intensity of social media sometimes speeds its way to powerful spasms of human emotion, flowing from person to person, country to country, continent to continent. So why not the next likely step in this ascending ladder of (technological) awareness – the development of a global noosphere where minds, emotions, perceptions, and events are entangled in their full complexity, with everyone on the hunt for ready-at-hand explanations, but also, and this is crucial, feeling the extreme intensity of cruelty and barbarism in faraway places and distant spaces in the crucible of individual conscience. When individual conscience is bundled by technological platforms into gigantic waves of awareness and, what's even more intense, into particle flows of powerful emotions moving everywhere at high speed, then we're suddenly

living in the age of global soul talk. Not soul talk like in the old days of Bible study, church attendance, and confession of sins, but soul talk now as a new evolutionary stage of humanity: operationalized by digital technology, fascinated by extreme events, diffused universally in the form of orgies of feeling and donations, but, all the while, intensely intimate, absolutely personal in its encounter of distant events and individual ethical judgments of right and wrong. In the struggle for the global soul that is Ukraine today, it is a decidedly uneven competition. Always palpably fearing the power of individual sovereignty and certainly the force field of free speech and association, Russia has opted for the policing strategy of a *closed* society: Orwellian speech (“special military operation”), fifteen-year prison terms for political dissenters, clubbing protesters, humiliating their bodies, beating people, putting just about everyone on notice of enhanced mass surveillance, turning television and radio into instruments of state propaganda. There’s definitely not much room for the global soul in closed society, although if our reading of Russian classical literature serves us right, the existential passions of the Russian mind might be suppressed by the immediate pressure of draconian control, and the intensity of existential passion in the Russian soul definitely might recede, but it will never really disappear.

With Ukraine, it’s a different story. Here, the philosophy of the heart is always ready to blaze up in soul talk. How could it not? Its cities are smashed by hard blows from the military hammer, its citizens like an anvil waiting for the next blow, its population in flight or in fight. When the pitilessness of Russian aggression is volatilized by social media, the result is mind awareness that sweeps the global noosphere. The truth of this is to be found in the United Nations General Assembly with its vote of 141–5 against Russian aggression; in growing armies of international volunteers who risk death in the streets to fight, render medical assistance, or distribute much-needed supplies under the missile-streaked skies of Ukraine; and in the very palpable feeling of frustration by many people at being intimate witness to savagery with no practical means of doing anything about it. Again, war in the age of social media has already gone well beyond mass perception to something very different – the evolution of human awareness into a global soul fit for travel at the speed of light. That’s Ukraine’s philosophy of the heart, spinning its way social media stream by stream into *the* twenty-first century quantum event with all its entanglements, volatility, fast vectors, unpredictable outcomes, and slow indeterminacy.

Glory to Ukraine.

Slaughterhouse 1: Pathology of War Crimes

Women across Ukraine are grappling with the threat of rape as a weapon of war as growing evidence of sexual violence emerges from areas retaken from retreating Russian forces.

The world was horrified on Sunday by a picture taken by the photographer Mikhail Palinchak on a highway 20km outside the capital, Kyiv, in which the bodies of one man and three women were piled under a blanket. The women were naked and their bodies had been partially burned, the photographer said.³⁶

War crimes are part of the logistics, tactics, and strategy of contemporary warfare. In Ukraine, Russia's (military) order of the day is rape, pillage, and violence: bombs planted in corpses; civilians murdered by guns, artillery, missiles; women raped in front of their children and families; domestic dwellings destroyed, apartment buildings bombed, hospitals blasted apart, churches vaporized, theatres targeted, schools demolished; prisoners tortured, killed, and hastily buried in mass graves. Openly adopting the tactics of contemporary fundamentalist terrorism with its preference for vulnerable, undefended "soft targets" for suicide bombers, the Russian military has made the Ukrainian civilian population the soft target of choice in its overall strategic calculations. On the surface, there are purely *instrumental* reasons for adopting the logic of war crimes (violence against civilians and non-combatants) as a key part of Russian offensive operations, namely terrorizing the civilian population in order to break the will to resist, creating chaos everywhere, inducing a generalized feeling of insecurity, vulnerability, and panic among civilians, destroying normality by pushing entire populations to flight and displacement. However, at the *metabolic* level, that point where violence speaks to a new truth about vulnerable bodies in times of war, contemporary warfare has long ago ceased to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, civilians and soldiers. Warfare activates the vortex of the abyss of darkness. Its logic is aggression. Its only rhythm is fast death/slow destruction. It releases the whirlwind in human affairs. It sucks everything into the blackness of its density. Its heat blasts everything in its path. Its pressure implodes the fabric of (civilian) space/time. Its violence is random, accidental, and

36 Bethan McKernan, "Rape as a Weapon: Huge Scale of Sexual Violence Inflicted in Ukraine Emerges," *Guardian*, 4 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/03/all-wars-are-like-this-used-as-a-weapon-of-war-in-ukraine>.

capricious. Its violence is targeted, precise, and systematic. It energizes itself by bloodletting. It measures success by body counts. It is both explosive (missiles, bombs, artillery) and psychologically implosive in its chaotic energy. Soft targets are easy prey for the vortex of the darkness. Undefended bodies are certain objects of attraction for vortical energies. Mass death energizes the war machine. Individual deaths of the most vulnerable animate its psycho-sexual energies. It has the appetite of a predator, the mentality of a death machine; its name is cruelty. It is indiscriminate in its violence, always out of control, functioning best, which is to say most viciously, when it is out of bounds. The vortex is always hungry for human flesh and material objects. Violence is the event horizon energizing the whirlwind that is the black hole at the centre of contemporary warfare. Only that which is hardened, armoured, defended can resist its centripetal pull. Only that which can exercise counterviolence can resist its centrifugal pressure. War crimes are the essence of its metabolism.

This is nothing novel. The twentieth century was a slaughterhouse of war crimes. Capricious carpet bombing of European cities during the Second World War; the savagery of mass murder that was the Holocaust; the systematic and barbaric war on the population with bombs, missiles, chemicals, assassination, and concentration camps that was the American War in Vietnam; the “double tap” drone attacks on Afghan civilians participating in weddings and funerals that was the weapon of choice for American war strategists vicariously participating in the violence through real-time screens. Mass murder, chemical attacks, and total destruction by the Russian war machine in Grozny and Aleppo. This is what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger described as *abuse value*, that point where human beings have value only as objects of abuse, what planners of the war machine have traditionally described as collateral damage on the way to a larger strategic goal.

Consequently, Ukraine is an ethical tipping point. Will abuse value and, with it, the death-instinct animating the war machine rise into visibility as the defining trajectory of the twenty-first century? Or, will the global soul somehow resist the death-instinct with its reduction of human beings to objects of abuse, in favour of the resurgence of life itself? That is what is really at stake. Death or life? Abuse value or the singular dignity of the individual? Total warfare or committed resistance? More than simply a defender of European (liberal humanist) values, Ukraine puts in the balance the death-instinct versus the life-instinct, destruction versus resurgence, absolute power as opposed to the relative power of freedom. Ukraine is a fateful talisman of the future. Or, something more complicated. Namely the instant appropriation of

the language of ethical resistance by existing empires of power. Here, the powerful synchronization of authentic human emotions of outrage, revulsion, and resistance that is the global soul would be channelled by yet other expressions of absolute power, particularly the United States, into long-term strategies for weakening the alliance of clashing powers – Russia, China, India, Brazil. Energized by mass media, globally diffused by social media, witnessed in real time by a global audience, global outrage is fluid, slippery, undefined, dynamic. Its strong affectivity can be channelled. Its powerful emotions can be directed. Its thirst for justice can be hijacked. And something else as well. No sooner do images, sounds, and texts of global outrage stream on social media, then they are discounted and deconstructed by opposing streams of global public opinion. Here, facts are disputed, counter-images proposed, alternative narratives constructed, clashing spectacles provided, different “truths” streamed, contested versions televised. With this, the meaning of the global soul is suddenly rendered something fully liquid, changeable, in flux, in motion; something deliriously unstable, definitely perspectival, as it forms the event horizon surrounding the black hole of violence. Here, orgies of global outrage rise and fall in intensity, interpreting the meaning of violence, arguing the counterfactuals, presenting, and then challenging, the evidence, with truth-telling itself continually changing polarities, flipping between (information) gradient and (disinformation) counter-gradient. A flickering signifier, global outrage oscillates between life and death – fascinated by the death-instinct, energized by the life force, simultaneously *cynical* (truth-telling from above) and *kynical* (truth-telling from below). Once it goes global on social media, everything is suddenly perspectival: facts, truths, narratives, feelings. Nothing is stable or remains steady-state. Everything is energized, fast, streaming, recircuited, rechannelled, remapped, hijacked, virtualized. Everything is in play, fully questionable, even the definition and trajectory of the global soul. That is the real singularity of streamed life in the twenty-first century.

Slaughterhouse 2: Bearing Witness to the Death-Instinct

What can be said of artists, documentary film-makers, television reporters, and independent journalists who have been killed, wounded, captured, and tortured in the war in Ukraine? Simultaneously bearing witness to violent scenes and themselves victims of the same violence, their presence always has a double significance – witness to the kinetics of atrocity and casualty of the dark vortex. In fact, more than most, their

actions are doubly consequential. With regard to mass perception on a global scale, bearing witness serves as the eyes of the world. With respect to the global response to scenes of atrocity, their reporting, whether by journalism, film-making or art, is an open nervous system: proximate to violence, intimate with atrocity, exposed to danger. Their perception is globalized and thus virtual in its effects, but their bodies are localized and thus vulnerable to violence. They always live in the intra-zone, the liminal border, between the global and the local. They always work in split zones of space and time: in space, their words, images, and silence are a matter of pure extension; in time, their bodies are always tied tight to the gravity well of local (war) circumstances. They always *create* at the border of the known and unknown, the evidence-based and the speculative inference. They always *die, bleed, are captured, or abused* with well-known names that rise immediately into global visibility or with names that disappear without a trace – not grieved, recognized, or identified.

They are the world's first pilgrims of the event horizon surrounding the black hole of violence. On the event horizon, everything is spinning, unpredictable, transitory, chaotic, with things happening fast, with interpretations fragmentary, uncertain, partial. With its crushing gravitational pressure, no light escapes the black hole, but sometimes estimations can be made of its angular momentum, contents, velocity. That's life on the event horizon where every television report, social media posting, radio broadcast, filmed incident, recorded conversation, drone attack captured in real time, murdered body frozen in dead-time, child screaming, and person weeping offers tangible clues about what has already happened and will likely be about to happen. Past events, present sorrows, and futures foreboding all circulate about at high speed in the event horizon surrounding the kinetics of atrocity – final anticipatory reflections before the screen goes black in atrocity time.

But, of course, barbarism does not want witnesses; savagery fears the power of the image; abuse value recoils at countersurveillance; murder thrives on isolation. That is why artists, journalists, film-makers, human rights workers, and engaged musicians are prey for the kinetics of atrocity: specially targeted, their names inscribed on lists of the hunted, their bodies often gagged, whipped, and mutilated. In these circumstances, truth-telling is met with frenzy, art is a death sentence, graffiti a prison-term, images deleted, sounds silenced, documentary film-making a ticket to desolation, bearing witness of any sort a challenge to be met with ferocious, madcap violence. Bearing witness to the kinetics of atrocity, then, as witnessing the dehumanization of individual singularity – Ukrainians now, the rest of us anytime soon; being

a living presence before the death-instinct as it reduces everyone to an object of abuse. The place for bearing witness is the event horizon; the scene is the kinetics of atrocity; the time is now; the price is, most often, death by guns, knives, explosions, accidents, wrong turns, correct turns, moving too slow, moving too fast, or maybe just not moving at all – weary, numbed, and exhausted. Another pilgrim lost on the way to Jerusalem, on the road to Babylon, on the path to delirium.

Slaughterhouse 3: Metabolic War

So then, the question of the meaning of mythology in the slaughterhouse? If the military struggle between Russia and Ukraine can be so grisly in its battlefield intensity and remorseless in its cruelty, maybe what is really at stake is something truly foundational, namely which historical imaginary will guide the Slavic future – Russian absolutism or Ukrainian democracy? And, in that choice, there is something at stake here even more eschatological in its political significance, specifically which of these two historical imaginaries will represent the true spirit of the Rus? Is the origin story of the people of the Rus essentially European with time-worn stories of Swedish Vikings sweeping south from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea in the eighth century, founding Kyiv, and thus implicating the Rus in the early origin story of Europe itself? Or, as contemporary (Russian) anti-Normanist interpretations insist, something very different – namely, and this against convincing contemporary archaeological evidence to the contrary, that Slavic consciousness has always been historically dominant, with the Viking presence only a historical outlier. As usual, with clashing origin stories, everything is framed by the language of mythology, shrouded in time past, complicated by contested archaeological evidence, competing interpretations, fragmentary claims.

What's at stake is the future of Ukraine itself. Is Ukraine to continue to be what it always has been – a highly creative, immensely energetic uncertainty field, a quantum fluctuation, part-European, part-Slavic? Or is Ukraine to be dominated by pure Slavic mythology, with the beautifully creative uncertainty at the heart of Ukrainian identity suddenly reduced to an ideologically prescribed founding myth – the people of the Rus with “being Ukrainian” itself perceived as a viral contamination of the purity of the founding origin myth? With the absolute ferocity of other designated origin myths before it, from the pure Aryan race of German fascism to the pure worker's paradise of Stalinist times, Ukraine is involved today in an existential struggle to the death, where

what's really at stake is not only something *spatial* – the question of territory – but *time* itself – the continued existence of Ukrainian identity, *being Ukrainian* – as an ineluctable dimension of the history of humanity – *being Ukrainian* struggling not to disappear from the face of the earth. Which is precisely why the war in Ukraine now witnesses truly savage acts of genocide with the forced dehumanization of Ukrainians, soldiers and civilians alike. It is also why political dissent in the domestic (Slavic) homeland of Russia itself is met with elemental force intended to crush it, to disappear it. When purely fictional mythology is volatilized by an imperial state, animated with the highly charged life force of official propaganda and then blasted into the heat bath of contemporary politics, then any form of dissenting opinion is dangerous since it introduces the possibility of elemental doubt into the purity, *the certainty field*, of the founding mythology. So then, when absolute myth enters contemporary political history, the result is *violence without* – the disappearance of Ukrainian identity and the conquest of Ukrainian territory – but also *violence within* – the crushing of the fracture line that is political doubt in the ideological homeland of the imperial state itself. With this, the conduct of war goes metabolic, spiralling beyond the conquest of earthly territory to the unearthly domain of psycho-ontology.

Slaughterhouse 4: Russia Death Star

Russia death star? That's Putin's Russia today as the real slaughterhouse the future of which probably will parallel the celestial destiny of all dying, collapsing stars before it – one last brilliant blast as the Russian death star goes supernova followed by its instant implosion into the galactic graveyard of a political blackhole. Trapped in the final spasm of a once radiant star imploding into its fatal remainder, Russia now moves at immense velocity in the direction of pure entropy. Everything is quickly coming apart, shrinking, panicking, purifying, policing, threatening, attacking, fantasizing, consolidating towards basic survival necessities. The silent majority of the Russian population remains, as always, a solid mass – mute, unknown, giving off no overt signals, publicly assenting, privately questionable, perhaps dissenting, possibly exhilarated by the rush of imperial events. Russian elites – security forces, army brass, media stars, spies, oligarchs, military strategists, nationalist visionaries, digital masterminds, elders of the Russian Orthodox Church and, of course, Putin himself (the universal sign at the centre of all Russian things) – are the energizing force, driving events, local and international, at the frenzy speed of virtual velocity.

And Russia itself? Suddenly thrown out of its usual orbital rotation in the international order – condemned by the UN General Assembly, encircled by a suddenly expanded NATO alliance, forced to rely on Chinese leadership which has longstanding territorial grievances with Russia of its very own, finding friends only with North Korea, Syria, and Eritrea – Russia finds itself shunned, derided, isolated, feared, but also pitied. Animated by paranoia, its spin rate goes faster and faster. Increasingly erratic, definitely unpredictable, seemingly acting against its own rational (preservationist) instincts, an imperial power with festering grievances, a regional power with imperial fantasies, Russia looks to the distant stars for guidance, goes fully astronomical in its ambitions, and ends up doing what all dying, collapsing stars have done before it. It begins to shed energy, randomly, wildly, enthusiastically, aggressively, manically. The energy flows are there for the whole, suddenly mesmerized, world to see: the military invasion of Ukraine carried out under the semiotic sign of a “special military operation”; bombs, missiles, artillery blasts the force field of a military apparatus out of control; mass murder of Ukrainian civilians; targeted killings of Ukrainian males of conscription age; reports of twenty thousand hired mercenaries from Syria and Libya; threats of chemical warfare; diplomatic notes highlighting nuclear weaponry; press releases about “unpredictable consequences,” with potential enemies stretching from the United States and the eastern edge of the European Union, particularly the Baltic shelf of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, and Sweden. No powerful friends anywhere, potential enemies everywhere, the energy force field of Russian military aggression is fuelled by the always suspicious mind of the imperialist imaginary, volatilized by ancient fears of encirclement, trapped in the vocabulary of ancient grievances, picking at the scab of unresolved disputes. Here, Russian (military) energy is shed at the speed of desperation; Russian (political) energy is dissipated to the sounds of paranoia; Russian (cultural) energy is crushed at the anvil of political absolutism; Russian (rebellious) energy is immobilized by ubiquitous surveillance; and Russian (economic) energy is suppressed by international sanctions. The only question remaining has to do with the strength of the supernova effect. Will the fast dissipation of Russian energy heat up to the supernova that is full-scale nuclear warfare? Or will the Russian energy field, monitored by a very worried world, frustrated by Ukrainian resistance, and fearful of domestic resistance from slow, prolonged warfare suddenly reverse field, burning out and fading like a white dwarf in the political universe? And even then, the question of the future is not settled. Energy is always in constant movement, transiting from one virtual

site to another, transforming dissipated energy into the energy of resurgence, changing the high-voltage field of Russian imperial recklessness into the newest cosmological constant in the energy universe. That's Ukraine as the sure and certain successor to the collapsing death star that is Russia, with the future features of a resurgent Ukraine already plainly evident among the shadows, gloom, and darkness that is Russia today moving at the speed of a fatal implosion.

L Lonesome Cowboys to the Stars

Perseverance Has Landed on Mars

NASA releases an amazing video of the Perseverance robot landing on Mars, the fabled red planet of science fiction imaginaries. It shows brilliant aeronautical engineering skills moving at the forward edge of human creativity: the space vehicle on its approach to the Mars environment slowing abruptly from 12,500 mph to 1.61 mph; “seven seconds of terror” while the parachute flares out, a second drone is released from the mothership, and Perseverance itself, attached by an electronic umbilical cord, is delicately lowered to the Martian surface thanks to a dramatic sky crane manoeuvre in the icy cold, stark environment.

NASA engineers in California are predictably and justifiably ecstatic, media commentators wildly enthusiastic, and most everyone else taking a moment from their otherwise routine pandemic stay-at-home day to admire this technological adventure far away in the solar system – lightness of galactic being like a psychological lift-off from the heaviness of the viral pandemic. It is the dream of technological transcendence at its most transcendent: overcoming obstacles, inventing new survival machinery for withstanding Mars's decidedly hostile environment, taking chances, risking risky manoeuvres – the technological imaginary dramatically expanding its reach across the solar system. Deep space theatre at its live-streaming best. The project may have cost 2.7 billion dollars and the twenty-three camera array on Perseverance may scan the red horizon collecting images of a desolate, rocky surface that would otherwise pass for a gravel pit off an

isolated country road on earth, but it's all something else. Perseverance has landed on Mars.

The NASA narrative goes on to say something about the wonderful human adventure that is deep space exploration. We turn off the video, thinking thoughts to ourselves, probably churlish and definitely against the tide of these the most technological of times, about the stupendous wealth of American society and its enthusiastic willingness to burn off that wealth in such a spectacular deep space potlatch. Either a big step forward in what's touted as the innate human instinct to explore or use-less expenditure at its most extravagant, or perhaps both at the same time. Perseverance has landed on Mars.

Failed Landing on Earth

Our attention is distracted by another report streaming across the screen, this time not far, far away on a distant planet, but closer to earthly home, the sea off the coast of Bangladesh near India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Definitely not the launch of a futuristic deep space vehicle, but a lowly, unnoticed earth launch, or to be more precise, the launch of an overcrowded, smugglers' boatload of Rohingya refugees, trying desperately to escape from the endless waiting time of Bangladesh refugee camps to Malaysia or Indonesia, with ambitions to begin life anew. The image shows tightly packed Rohingya refugees drifting aimlessly at sea, emaciated, with failed engines, nowhere to land, no food or water. The narrative is clear: no landing, no refuge, no hope, no transcendence. The United Nations issues an urgent call for maritime rescue, but there is only silence in response. No sky crane manoeuvres here. No tiny helicopters popping out of the underbelly of Perseverance for a ninety-second joy ride in the Martian sky. Definitely not even a microphone to capture the cries for rescue or record the sounds of daily death as bodies are tossed into the waiting ocean. Pleas for mercy fall on hostile ears. Perhaps fear of viral contagion has led to a further contagion of hardened borders and even more hardened (official) minds. Could that be the way of earth today, and perhaps all the tomorrows of the future too?

Now we know that the two scenes are supposedly unrelated, except by proximity in time and simultaneity in video streaming. But still we wonder: What does it mean to live in the twenty-first century and to give witness to such an ethical impossibility? One the triumphant story of technological transcendence, the other the unfolding of human tragedy in real time. The projection of space-bound power contrasted with

the dark immanence of earthbound misery and sadness. The first video about migrating to the stars; the second about global migration with nowhere to go. One astral, the other watery. One moving at the speed of the hyperfast, the other moving in the slow time of death and dying. Both stories are part of the contemporary human condition, proximate in time, but, of course, spatially and ethically distanced in relationship to one another. But still, for all that, this is a story of entangled ethics, just that point where events so closely proximate in time brush up against one another in terms of common ethical questions raised. After all, both events are the consequential results of the drive to technological mastery of nature and human nature as the key ontology of these most turbulent of times. The global village of technological dreams has very real implications in material life, winners and losers in the greater games of virtual transcendence.

In the NASA video, the winners are clear. The technocratic class has broken out of the supposed dead weight of earthly gravitation to take first baby steps in future human habitation of the solar system. The spirit of colonialism goes galactic, with hymnals to the human instinct for exploration the cheerful chorus playing in the background. In effect, what we give (streaming) witness to is an effective merger of ambitions, interests, and prodigious talents between the two leading classes of technological society, (*engineering*) *specialists* with a solid track record of successfully overcoming challenging impediments in the way of mission accomplishment, and the *lead directors* of technological society, in this case a working coalition of political, economic, and scientific elites. In both cases, a common mindset with instrumental activism as their social psyche, the enhancement of adaptive capacity their (technological) rallying cry, and the fulfilment of a purportedly human destiny tilting in favour of space exploration their sustaining narrative. All this made possible by a very clever blending of space exploration with a political theology based on American nativism, the Mars flight viewed as only the most recent illustration of the enduring mythology of westward-bound wagon trains, leaving behind the worn, earthly treks to the American frontier to start a galactic trek to the stars. When it all somehow, sometimes goes wrong, as in the case of Columbus and Challenger, the frontier mythology remains the same. Only this time, the victims of grim technological crashes are depicted as sacrificial heroes pointing the way ahead.

The losers in this global game of technological adventurism are equally clear. That's the drifting boat of forgotten Rohingya refugees, and all those other unwanted, sinking ships of refugees and

asylum-seekers drowning in the many seas of the earth. The dice of power and privilege have been thrown, and their fate has come up as a surplus class to the greater technological ambitions of the world – unwanted, prohibited, excluded, silenced. Their very bodily existence is taken as peripheral to unfolding story of the times and, perhaps, even something terminal, namely what the political theorist Judith Butler has described as being among the “morally ungrievable.” In this case, the failed earthly landing of Rohingya refugees elicits only the faintest hints of ethical compassion because their bodies, their unwanted bodies, have already been stripped in advance of the saving grace of the act of grieving – the moral register of the human. That is why their fate, unlike the Perseverance rover landing, is a passing story, already untouched by demands for real responsibility and moral accountability. Indeed, Butler would describe their fate as that of “bodies that don’t matter,” but we would go further with the sense that their disappearance from the ethical register of technologically advanced societies indicates a more implacable refusal, namely that these are *souls* that do not matter, that their very *being*, viewed as not essential to the sustaining logic of power, renders them superfluous in detail and definition, in spirit as well as in body. So then, deeply entangled ethics for a contemporary world with split screen ethical consciousness.

Hardened Borders Break the Psychic Barrier

There is something else as well. A cruel example concerning the ethics of hardened borders. For those within the borders of technological privilege, the sky literally is the limit and even that spatial horizon can be punctured at will with feverish plans for colonization of deep space. For those forced, or held waiting outside increasingly hardened borders, their lives suspended in refugee camps, their fate remains the severity of exclusion, the indifference of popular amnesia. What might have begun as a response to the hyped-up “war on terror” has now taken firm purchase on human sensibilities. Here, hardened borders have increasingly migrated from the realm of physical structures in the landscape, have broken down the skin barrier, and have taken possession of the human psyche. Inestimably more effective than physical exclusion, hardened walls at the borderlines of the human soul are as deep-rooted in emotion as they are intractable in their enduring permanence. While physical walls may stop unwanted human traffic, psychic moral walls shut down ethics

of compassion and responsibility. So then, an ethical free fall in the political psyche: demonizing the outsider, scapegoating refugees, undermining the claims to moral responsibility of asylum-seekers, injecting the spectre of potential terrorism into debates concerning immigration by Muslims from other lands. Here, stories about violence fled or hasty escapes from abuse, if not death, are never told. Failed attempts for successful earth landings on more welcoming shores never heard.

More ominously, if general indifference towards the pleas for social justice by the unwanted, prohibited, and excluded is matched only by populist fury towards their very presence in the world, might this not also intimate that refugees and asylum-seekers today are the sacrificial expenditure required to maintain the momentum of technological society? Politically, we are witness to events in country after country, in continent after continent, where global migrants have one last sacrificial function, namely as convenient scapegoats for creating moral cohesion among populations living within hardened borders. Their exclusion a rationale for greater policing; their desire to migrate perceived as a potential threat to public safety; their "illegal entry" an economic opportunity for the expansion of a growing network of detention facilities in abandoned warehouses, vacant factories, wire cages, and retrofit prisons.

Could it be possible, just possible, that in the end hardened borders are not really about establishing material demarcations concerning bodies that count and bodies that don't count, but instead represent a growing fury of spirit-possession on the part of privileged populations directed towards the excluded, the outsider, the unwanted? Here, bodies that don't count in the general calculus of events are assigned one last sacrificial function, namely as a locus on which to conjure up images of evil, threatening spirits. Hardened borders, then, not just as a partitions against global flows of migrant populations, but a kind of fatal exorcism of the souls of the dispossessed – psychic scapegoats for provoking increasingly atavistic feelings of anxiety, panic and alarm, calcifying emotions, for conjuring up psychic furies as the emotional language animating the palpable madness of contemporary politics. But still, for all that, the spectacular images of Perseverance landing on Mars and melancholic images of Rohingya failing to land on solid earth, with ourselves giving (media) witness to these events, living somewhere in the ethical void opened up by the impossibility of their conjuration, provide the first, and probably most primal, ethical link between Mars and Earth.

Macrobursts and Sun Dogs in the Gathering Sky of Global Politics

Macrobursts and Sun Dogs in the darkening sky of global politics? That's the moment when the war spirit reverses course, suddenly moves back on itself, inward, implosive, begins to feed voraciously on the remains of the death of the social. No longer the war spirit in its original incarnation as Nietzsche's "creative deed" – self-confident, exuberant, outward bound, history making – but the war spirit now, residual, a shadow of its former self, but still predatory, still filled with destructive energies, still keyed by the instinct of aggression, but attracted this time to softer targets, first violence towards the most vulnerable, intimidation of the precarious, abuse of the weak, and manipulation of the disappearing mass, and then, of course, spiralling inward towards the soft spots of human flesh: mood modification by drugs, by social media feeds, by the hallucinatory power of media; emotion mapping by skin-crawling algorithms; brain flushing, drained daily by the distraction machine that is the flow of information. The death of the social is as noticeable now as it is fully enigmatic – scavenger culture living on the dying energies of its own spent social, psychic, and bodily remainders. Global politics is on the boil between the masked and the unmasked, the vaccinated and the unvaccinated, with power itself wagered on a fateful clash between right wing populism fighting for the right to be sick and neo-liberal regimes organized around disciplinary narratives concerning the health of the body.

Not just climate extremes and warmed up bodies, but human emotions, too, are on high heat, out of control, volatile, just waiting to blow. It's everywhere: fists flying between the masked and the unmasked, rancour from deep in the belly politic spilling into public debate, unprovoked attacks by dead-eyed killers with cars, knives, and guns against the unsuspecting on the streets or in our homes, words of hate flooding the net, words of anger circulating across the media vortex, words of taunting meant to keep everything on the boil, words of despair waiting to be heard, words of sorrow with nowhere to go. With climate change not only is planet earth rapidly heating up, but bodies now are getting warmer, steaming, just reaching that breaking point where they swiftly change state, go liquid, vapourize as they blend with the digital, and go stone cold to their own lived materiality. Here, the human spirit climbs out of the wreckage of the infection-bound body and decides to take its

chance on the mesmerizing spells of the future digital. Our contemporary situation, then, as a sharp contrast between the growing seduction of digital phantasmagoria and the material reality of global clusters of infected bodies.

With this, viral biology loops into viral politics, and viral contagion accelerates into a clash of contagious political narratives, many focusing on post-mortems on the pandemic. Outbreaks of viral politics everywhere, with different spins on newly minted master narratives aiming to attach themselves to the belief systems of different host populations. Clashing narratives are ubiquitous. Scapegoats proliferate. Nations bunker down, empires raise their shields, individuals wear the hard armour of social isolation. Was the pandemic a product of a bioengineering viral design gone terribly wrong, accidentally or deliberately, released by a Chinese genetics lab for purposes of experimenting on an unsuspecting population? Or did the virus originate in an unfortunate, and certainly unexpected, transfer of a zoonotic virus, SARS-CoV-2, from an animal species (likely bats) to humans in a busy wet market in Hunan, China? Was a viral outbreak, initially thought containable, allowed to propagate freely through the inaction, denial, and indifference of many governments? A worldwide conspiracy by globalist elites riding the fear of the pandemic to initiate a lockdown of their domestic populations? Or something else, perhaps more ominous. A theological intimation of end times with its cosmology of coming dark days of witness and revelation, sinners left behind and spiritual transcendence for the pure? Or, for that matter, is the pandemic a viral sign written in the flesh of infected bodies of the general weakening of the human immune system, certainly of the social safety net but perhaps of the breakdown of personal immunity as well? Here, the viral pandemic could be defined in strictly Malthusian terms: a certain indicator that the limits of the technological conquest of nature have been reached, that viral biology is nature's counterstrike against globalist euphoria.

Conspiracy theories proliferate. Suspicions circulate. Facts deteriorate. Truth is in the balance. When pandemic fever slams into the human condition, conspiracy theories rise because, faster than facts on the ground, they move with the speed of viral contagion. Quickly circulating within dense networks of social media, instantly providing appealing narratives for intense feelings of anxiety, distress, anger, and frustration, conspiracy is the true imaginary of viral contagion. Conspiracies explain. They lay blame. They cast shame. A matter of virally driven faith, they cannot really be disproven. A product of alienation, they cannot easily be expelled. An expression of the darkness within, they are immune to the doubtful sunshine of expert-researched facts.

A perfect expression of the psychology of viral contagion, conspiracy theories are definitely not limited to a single medium but happily leap from one flowing media stream to another, from biology to politics and then to popular culture. Pandemic fever might have launched with a biological virus, but it certainly continues with the contemporary politics of viral contagion, with media commentators bemoaning the “swarm” that invaded Washington on that fateful day in January 2021 – right wing populism, then, as the perfect expression of the politics of viral contagion moving into the hearts and streets of violent dissent, and all this to the beat of the conspiracy imaginary.

Swarm Politics

Fighting their way into the Capitol, the swarm forgot or, perhaps, never knew the elementary rules of crowd behaviour, namely the political imperative to switch instantly from a leaderless swarm to a disciplined hunting pack. That’s why, like a forlorn after-image of energy dissipating in the halls of Congress, the swarm quickly fell apart into individuals aimless, shocked at the ease of entry, pumped up by the action, but without definite certainty about what actually to do. Power, or at least its elected representatives, had fled the scene just in time with ballot boxes in hand, leaving the scattered swarm with full possession of the dead architecture of power: empty congressional chambers, vacant offices, hallways populated by the aesthetics of memorialized power – statues, busts, and paintings. Watched everywhere by seemingly everyone, dazzled by the speed of the insurrection, and confused by its own fury, the swarm did what all confused swarms seem to like to do – play the role of boisterous tourists on an unexpected self-guided tour of the dead centre of politics, scribble vengeful notes to politicians who had wisely scattered to the wind, and sometimes pick fights with police defenders still standing, all to the wailing, background chorus of media elites. The sentence of mythic retribution enacted in the language of public opinion was swift and definitive. Guided by political leaders wise to the ways of symbolic power, the Capitol was instantly transformed from the profane space of politics to the “sacred place of democracy,” relegating the remainders of the swarm, whether individuals trapped in the bright lights of watching cameras, preening for the social media crowd with iPhones and Androids abundant, or strutting the angry man poses of Proud Boys, to the always undesirable mythic space of cardinal violators of the sacramental. The government played the game of symbolic politics to its delirious limits, public order was restored, surveillance

networks animated, legal authority resuscitated, and the public, once again, successfully put to sleep with energized dreams of democracy defended and public enemies repelled. By the end of that day of all fateful days, the smoke cleared, the gas dissipated, casualties were counted, and the state, cold and wise to the ancient games of power, quickly did what the swarm failed to do, turned itself into a disciplined hunting pack – patient, relentless, meticulous, armed with a long bureaucratic memory, energized by a visual data archive rich in opportunities for crowd searching by waiting masses of public opinion.

Trajectories of Catastrophe

But still for all that, in the quantum zone, biology and politics are always latecomers to the greater games of popular culture, where viral contagion and pandemic fever have long been mainstays of powerful memes circulating in the global imaginary of social media and gaming, with dystopian visions of social breakdown, infectious viruses, society-ending catastrophe scenarios, and ominous grids populated by surveillance networks of bio-police have now turned out to be the chillingly accurate, collective cultural preconsciousness of these, the dark days of pandemic fever.

And what are we to make of the battle of the vaccines? Is the banning of Chinese and Russian vaccines in Western countries on the basis of general, politically cultivated suspicion associated with the resurgence of these countries on the world scene? And what of the hoarding of vaccines by wealthy and powerful countries: a preventative measure to ensure the defence of domestic populations or a sure and certain sign of the continuing resilience of imperial power? And what about public health officials? Benign, neutral experts making decisions on the basis of the best available scientific information or apologists for governing elites using pandemic anxiety to do what they always wanted to implement, namely a new state of pastoral liberalism with the state as guardian-in-chief of a sufficiently cowed population, finally prepped for permanent governmental regulation?

Not just individuals, but social reality itself may have been terminally infected by the virus, with multiple, mutually exclusive explanations of the global plague circulating freely. Global politics, then, volatilized by the kinetic energy of the unreal. The pandemic: a quickly mutating, swiftly adaptable virus flowing through transportation networks (air, ship, trains, and cars) of an increasingly globalized world invading human flesh, infecting respiratory systems – death by suffocation and

subsequent organ failure. Or, just the opposite, the pandemic as symptomatic of generalized social distress orchestrated, if not plotted, by shrewd globalists, and all this fiercely denounced by right wing populist movements, with many people refusing to vaccinate, in effect, fighting for free choice on the question of bodily infection? With this, events pass quickly and irrevocably from the bounded rationality of the real to the delirious irrationality of the unreal, with a new kind of kinetic energy visible everywhere at those points of crackling pandemonium where clashing narratives meet, from media and the workplace to streets, businesses, school, and home. Maybe what we are witnessing with all those warmed up bodies, extreme climate events, and feverish imaginations is the kind of kinetic energy that can only come from friction – the heat generated not just by a crowded planet with its packed-together city streets, office towers, and the lonely slab architecture of glass-walled condos, but that energy of friction, kinetic energy, that jumps straight out of too much digital connectivity, too much rubbing together of individual imaginations with scenes of a world out of control and seemingly animated by it all the more. Here, the pandemic does not just speed up massive cultural transitions already underway – disciplinary politics, hardened borders, remote work, Zoom learning, the resurrection of suburbs, full automation, wireless society, digital connectivity, the triumph of real time – but it also accelerates the ascendancy of technological society in its most intensified expression – life in the quantum zone with all its kinetic energy, viral contamination, pandemic fever, conspiracy theories, and confusing rising – as the essence of twenty-first century experience.

N Nostalgia for Nostalgia: That Just Trumps Everything

A media report gave early warning of President Trump's launch of his very own social media platform, Truth Social. The tag line is "Frightening." That's definitely true, but then again, perhaps it's also that bored in sleepy Mar-a-Lago with its golf, wine, barbecue steaks, and kitschy architecture, the last and most energetic of all the self-styled vicious clowns of the American political carnival, the man with a smile and a snarl, misses his target demographic. Not

just the roar of pumped-up crowds, hot rhetoric, and the silenced Republican establishment, but the frenzy of the spectacle itself, with the visual image of Trump, his every gesture, pout, glance, scape-goat, and derision, turned into a mesmerizing spectacle of itself. A product of television who skilfully sign-switched his way to Twitter on the way to the presidency, Trump's seduction has everything to do with that gleaming gold vein of powerful psychic emotions: *nostalgia*. Certainly nostalgia for the broken-down male ego, for an America seemingly in irreversible decline, for faded away white bodies, hardened borders, and lost opportunities put on layaway, but mostly the Trump spectacle feeds on profound nostalgia for itself, for its disappearance from the public scene, for its exile to the always noonday sun of a Florida resort, for the psychic pain of having its body unplugged by Twitter, outlawed by Facebook, spurned by social media, quickly sidelined and apparently forgotten by a fickle media scene. So then, the announcement of the symbolic restoration, with the Trump spectacle reanimating itself from its ghostly remainder, hoping to reconnect with the scattered energies of the missing American populist right wing mass in order to put itself together one more time, deeply nostalgic for its loss of symbolic energy, angry at suddenly being the leading figure of the society of the missing spectacle, yearning, really yearning, to take full possession once again of real kinetic energy, the friction of charismatic power, where the only thing that really counts is the seduction of the spectacle itself: those dreamy days of media mesmerized by Trump's every word, insult, blame, rancour, and demeaning expression, that point where Trump was effectively transformed into the spectacle of all spectacles. However, the question remains: can second-hand spectacles be revived? Can faded imaginaries be restored to their previous heights? Can politically cancelled identities be reanimated in all the delirious fiction of their abiding friction? What happens when a spectacle in eclipse dips again into to the always fast-moving media stream which has already swept away the recent past like shipwrecked vessels marooned after the storm?

The answer is definitely yes *and* no, and both at the same time. *Yes*, because there is nothing more powerful than a spectacle animated by deep nostalgia, that kind of unconscious, yearned remembrance that sweeps right by the frontal (reasoning) cortex of the brain and takes up psychic residence in the most ancient, primitive, emotional parts of the brain stem, that rudimentary, impulsive brain matter passed on from generations past to generations rising. That's nostalgia, a kind of deep-seated emotional nucleus that's not easily wiped away, that

feeds on itself, and that is never as powerfully potent as when it is about nostalgia for nostalgia, a feverish yearning coming full circle, nostalgia for the restoration of the spectacle in eclipse. To test the truth of this assertion, you just have to look to the master book of the stars. It never lies. That brilliant galaxy of celebrities – stars of music, screen, fashion, and literature – physically dead, by drugs, booze, scandal, or crashes, and maybe just by life itself, but somehow, sometimes, magically reanimated into spectacular second lives, more symbolically alive in nostalgia after the earthly death of the star-crusted body than in the jagged edges and turned down, burned out spaces of faded life itself. And *no*, because nothing ever escapes the mythic curse of destiny, that just as ancient philosophy made the point that you can never enter the same stream twice, that life itself is virtual, about constant change, so, too, the spectacle never enters the same symbolic history twice made over. Events shift, memories fade, emotions cool, crowds disperse, the logic of history changes patterns with the seasons passing. But then again, nostalgia for nostalgia may operate by a different formula. It may just contain the magic elixir of being yes and no at one and the same time.

And why? Because nostalgia for nostalgia is its own reality: a self-enclosed, self-confirming hyperreality that never crosses history twice in the same way because, in the end as in the beginning, it is its own highly charged symbolic reality: stream, network, social media platform. Feeding on the psychic energies of remembrance of things past that may never have existed in the first instance and, for that very reason, are all the more emotionally powerful; leading a hand-to-mouth existence because nostalgia for nostalgia must spark fear or die, must catalyze the kinetic energy of mass fascination or quickly perish from this earth; nostalgia for nostalgia is now, and will always remain, a Yes to the friction of fiction and a No to the mythic curse of fatal destiny. That's frightening, but also deeply fascinating. The chimera that surfaces in bodily form again; the ghostly remainder that speaks; the exile who never really went away; the political failure more emotionally compelling in defeat than in power real time; the figure of abjection who refuses to be a victim of subjection.

This time wearing the skin of a social media platform, the vicious clown rises again for a fabled second life after political death. In politics as in life, nothing is more compelling, more fearful and seductive, than resurrection on its way to redemption at the baptismal font of nostalgia for nostalgia. Yet, nostalgia may not be what it used to be. And the sign of the rebirth – Truth Social – may soon be the epitaph on the tombstone. That just trumps everything perfectly.

O Open-Source Speedrunners

Electricity is our reality-machine. Switch on/Switch off.

Always unnatural like the soft glow of artificial light in the night-time sky and definitely always out of season like snow on a hot summer afternoon or cold hard rain on a desert landscape, electricity lights up the surrounding darkness, powers up life, sparks the imagination, stretches daytime well past the midnight hour, and remakes the dark density of the night into a bright-eyed mirror reflecting back the brilliance of all the surrounding artificial glow. The twentieth century was built on the technological platform of electricity: its manufacturing plants enabled by flows of electrical power, its urban geography and traditional patterns of work, life, and leisure redesigned to the rhythms of alternating current, its vision extended by the proliferation of electrically charged screens, from cinema, video, and television to digital devices; its power of flows ubiquitous, mesmerizing, enchanting, enabling.

But most of all, of course, electricity has a powerful influence on the human psyche. Like so many creative outriders of a new sustainable future, we can try to go off-grid, get off the circuit, change lifestyles to fit the natural rhythms of the pre-electrical, but how do you shed body and mind of their dependence on surrounding circuits of sustaining power? How do you eject immensely supportive electronic impulses, those pulsations of electrical energy from screens, appliances, devices, lights, the entire technologically charged-up environment, out of the cerebral cortex without doing terminal damage to the human brain? And if we could go back to the pre-electrical, disappearing again into the dark, making of ourselves circuit breakers of the logic of technology, effectively switching off the reality-machine that is electricity, would not some essential, perhaps indispensable, part of our identity be lost forever in the process? For better or worse, we are born skyriders of the violent storm of electricity as a reality-machine, riffing off its energy, animated by its pulsations, dancing the dance of life in its multiple circuits, always switched on, powered up, all our psychic breakers on full open, all our social transistors tuned to life at the speed of light. As humans, we may be figure to ground, noisy visible content to invisible environment in the unfolding story of electricity as the new real. But that also makes us the opposite – bodily grounding for unexpected lightning flashes, latter-day electricity apps busy at the feast of life, sometimes bored by the grind, or just trying to get some sleep in a

world suddenly divested of natural shadows. All this in a future that is now where the energy of the artificial sun, the speed of the media flow, the magic of AC/DC, is as accessible as the tactile flip of a switch, the sweep of a finger on a welcoming screen.

Mirrors Mirroring Mirrors

If electricity is the reality-machine of the future stretching out before us in the new millennium, that would make the artistic imaginary of Marcel Duchamp, the French sculpture, painter and installation artist, the world environment that we now inhabit. With an artistic imagination that buzz-sawed its way right through the fast-receding horizon of the technological future, Duchamp was an artistic talisman of the age of electricity, an aesthetic imaginary that was fully possessed by the power of (electronic) flows.³⁷ For Duchamp, everything is about energy: kinetic, pulsing, animated, static, flowing. Everything is about reality as a trans/former: transforming energy from one medium to another. Everything is about a radically new reality being suddenly put into play by the powerfully, charismatically energizing force of electricity. Everything is about reality as a “hinge experience.” It’s a magical opening to a new space/time where only contradictions are true, where opposites multiply, energize, and undergo changes of state in an instant, and where, in fact, the whole fabric of traditional Euclidean framework of space and time with its rules of fixed geometry suddenly dissolves, leaving us exactly where we are right now: the first pilgrims of the electronic way brave enough, or maybe crazy enough, to have passed right through the obtuse angle of the hinge to what lies on the other side – tumbling through the new space/time of the quantum zone where there is no certain direction home, no definite up or down, where things suddenly careen wildly, suddenly move sideways at random, unpredictable, tumbling through space, falling upward through time, becoming virtual. Here, reality as energy is a beautifully violent trans/former, transforming human bodies into data trash, human vision into image scanners, human emotions into emotes, reality itself into a modelling machine, life into code.

37 For a brilliant reflection on Duchamp’s artistic vision, see Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice, CA: The Lapis Press, 1990). Also, see “TRANS/formers: More than Meets the Eye Duchamp/Lyotard” in Fold 4 of *Wave Aesthetics* later in the present book.

And, of course, there is no more divine modelling machine than the power of electricity: the planetary flow of electrical current disappearing the darkness, illuminating cities, powering up digital devices, transforming bodies into clouds of data, channelling flows of artificial images into the splashy sunshine and dusky twilight of every new digital day, sparking the sound of music, energizing the media spectacle, metabolizing every tissue of life in the electronic stream that is the fabric of experience today – the fabric of space/time otherwise known as reality. In his famous installation, *Glass*, Duchamp actually performed the future that is now with an installation that consisted simply of two mirrors positioned at right angles to one another, *mirrors mirroring mirrors* into infinity. For Duchamp, what was key is the perspectival shift involved in actually dwelling in the space of mirrors mirroring mirrors, that space of a seemingly endless refraction of mirrored images reflecting mirrored images where the normal laws of Euclidean space and time are suddenly cancelled as we put on the (perspectival) skin of space/time that is delirious, floating, refracting, an infinity of endlessly receding images. Here, the clash of opposites – congruity/incongruity, order/chaos, figure/ground – energizes the field, catalyzing static energy into dynamic energy. That spark of energy that crackles and surges when opposites meet is the sound of entering the invisible, glassy background of all life today, the sound of floating signs, delirious images, power of flows, bodies simultaneously as waves and particles with spin, entanglement, positionality. Sound abstract? Not really, it is actually what has already happened to us when we stream with electrons, when we immerse ourselves into those contemporary *Glass* installations called digital devices, when blasts of electrified light from the screens that surround us take possession of our optic nerves, when electrified sounds crystallize into the third ear known as buds, when our subconscious rises up from the depths of the human psyche to make historic first contact with the irrational, the primitive, the atavistic world outside, the world of mass media and social media with their delirious flows of light-streamed images and electronically pulsating sounds. Here, the intimate, primitive, physical association of electricity and magnetism – *electromagnetism* – means that human beings have now become magnetic fields to the surrounding cloud of electrons – flesh magnets energizing images and sounds moving at the speed of light. The perspectival illusion that Duchamp brought into visibility with his installation, *Glass*, is now the reality-machine electrified that is more natural to us, and definitely more comfortable, than the wildness of nature. Simulation is the skin of the real. Artifice is the new force of nature on the block, and we're

just fine with it. Welcome, then, to *Glass* as a portal to the essence of twenty-first century experience.

But while Marcel Duchamp was the first of all the artistic imaginaries to understand, deeply and comprehensively, what lay ahead with the transformation of reality into an electric energy-machine, he definitely was not the last. The twentieth century exploded with the spectacle of creative artistic movements that sensed immediately what would happen when electricity powered up life itself, when the energizing flows of electric current broke the skin barrier, rushing right past the policing of rational thought in the frontal lobes of the cerebral cortex into the deepest recesses of the subconscious, into the dwelling place of the imaginary, the psyche, the atavistic. The stunning results of this aesthetic discovery were there for all to see: the beautifully delirious imaginary of surrealism with its urgent demolition of the aesthetic logic of representation: floating objects, spectral skies, impossible shifts of perspective, liquid bodies, languid time, magical artifice, commingling of species into new imaginary life forms; the creative upsurge that was Fluxus with its aesthetic commitment to doing artistic digs to find aesthetic magic among the vernacular ruins and the playdates of the everyday; and the sonic black holes, high-energy punk, wild performance intensity, and blast aesthetics of *Vorticism*. Here, the power of the subconscious prefigured the future, and that future was charged up with artistic energy, with the transformation of even the most unlikely of objects – pipes, hats, buildings, perspectives, bodily organs, facial expressions, flat-toned skies, motionless water, cold fire – into hinge experiences, gateways to a world of flows electrified, seamless circuits, and broken patterns, where objects, images, and people had no necessary relationship to one another except that they were suddenly swept up into the same field of energy, whether in photography, painting, sculpture, music, performance, or in life itself. Here, art became a chiaroscuro composition tracing out in sharp relief the contrasts of light and darkness in the suddenly electrified fabric of space/time. Artistic vision, then, as first on the scene forecasting what would happen when the human central nervous system and, with it, the entire fabric of space/time sticks its proverbial finger into the wall socket of a world gone electric – a reality-machine flowing to the rhythms of electrons. A social universe wrapped in high-energy step-up coils so powerful that they required the installation of step-down transformers to mitigate the impact of the flow of electrons on the always fragile human sensorium. In this case, artistic visionaries in the aesthetic trajectory traced by Duchamp, surrealism, Fluxus, and Vorticism literally made of their work step-down transformers for making visible the otherwise invisible flow of the glassy background of

all experience, that instant when electrical charge goes to ground in all those passing bodies, minds, screens, digital devices, bright city lights, and life in motion. Certainly, seen from the perspective of electrons, human beings are just cathodes, a convenient, irresistible means to form a circuit in all those devices electronic surrounding human flesh. But seen from the perspective of the human, the story is very different. In fact, we don't even need Frankenstein's monster abruptly jolted into life by electricity to know that we, too, are animated by electrons, comfortable with the power of flows, always living at the magical interstice of static and dynamic energy, jolted alive, again and again, by the rhythm of AC/DC now deeply tattooed into human DNA.

Hacking Electrons at Fast Velocity

Imagining magical mystery tours of the world electric, we recently met a young hacker of the future of electronics, Matthew Saliken, a recently graduated electrical engineer who has already done his academic degree one better with a creative imagination that actually flows like electricity, sparking the future, illuminating the present, an alternating current of insights and resistances. A vegan, West Coast style by choice, a survivalist critical of the mutilation of the planet by corporate pollutants, a speedway biker, and a gamer passionate with aesthetic intensity, he told us about two interesting cultural breaking waves to the future that he was tracking: one a new show, *Devs*, now streaming on FX, and the other an insurgent techno community of metagaming strategists fast coding on the wild side, speedrunners. This perked our interest since we are always scrounging around in the debris field of digital detritus floating by to discover clues to the future electronic. *Devs* and speedrunners did not disappoint because like outliers of the digital future that is fast crashing towards us, they present the antinomies of technology that will soon be our very own horizon of experience: one perfectly and coldly code-deterministic, the other a future of code rebels always seeking to run faster than the digital wind.

Devs is illuminating. Electricity gone metaphysics. Focused on the exploits of a secretive quantum computing company rolling the dice one thousand years into the future and the past, its conceit is that we are living now within the coded fabric of the real as a hyperbubble, that vanishing point where the model is the real, codes determine events, and algorithms platform the future and roll out the past. Know the codes, deep run the algorithms, put on the model as mind-drifter on fast velocity, and one can easily flow one thousand years into a future

predetermined by the shuffling of the codes or backtrack one thousand years into a past stage-managed by supporting arrays of codes. As the spoken words of *Devs* states the case:

The universe is deterministic. It's godless and neutral and defined only by physical laws. The marble rolls because it was pushed. The man eats because he is hungry. And effect is always the result of a prior cause. The life we lead, with all its apparent chaos, is actually a life on tram lines. Prescribed. Undeviated. Deterministic. I know it doesn't feel that way. We fall into an illusion of free will because the tram lines are invisible. And we feel so certain about our subjective state. Our feelings, our opinions, judgments. Decisions.

A world, then, of "causal determinism":

the theory that all events in the physical universe, itself based on natural laws, are determined by definite causes. Nothing is uncaused. And if causal determinism exists, then it explains not just physics but (in some formulations) also all actions and decisions, themselves effects of causes within the brain, a natural thing existent in a natural world.³⁸

And, what's best, models as the new real provide superb portals for time travel, either the future flash-forwarded or drifting through code-signals to the ever receding past. Neither absolute freewill nor fatal determinism, not cause or effect, but information itself as a time-traveler, with every data-point a gateway to past and future, every speck of information a possible revelation of *all* information.³⁹

So far, so bad. The reveal of a quantum computing corporation which should be all about probabilities, multiverses, and strange but interesting contradictions suddenly going all religious on us (the system's real name, it turns out, is DEUS) and presenting life in the hyperbubble as a suffocating, predictable, closed simulacrum, where predestination is the rule, pre-emptive coding of past and future the norm, and the old philosophical barnstormer of free will versus determinism the dramatic conceit. We know that this reveal cannot last for long and, in fact, it doesn't. By the final episode of the first season, we are presented with

38 Joshua St. Clair, "Explaining *Devs* in *Devs*," *Men's Health*, 5 March 2020. <https://www.menshealth.com/entertainment/a31196334/what-is-devs/>.

39 "Devs/inside Look: Welcome to *Devs*/FX," FX Networks, 23 March 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nY_4rMBGbU.

scenes from the quantum future, namely one of the main character's fateful choice between free will and determinism, a life-changing decision which jumps her right into the vanishing point where this serial on quantum computing should have started in the first place: the universe as both closed and multiverse, determined and probabilistic, tracked and indeterminate, predictable and free. In other words, *Devs* takes us straight to a cinematic replay of the particle physics of uncertainty, indeterminacy with the spirit of the special theory of relativity finally finding its way into downloadable television. A major theme across two thousand years of metaphysics distilled into an online serial.

And not a moment too soon. For if *Devs* totters between religion and technology, speedrunners are having none of that. This is a super-cool community of hypergaming strategists, gamers with such sophisticated expertise and deep code familiarity that they regularly do impossibly fast runs of video games: exploiting bugs or running glitchless with pure, polished skill, sometimes taking advantage only of AI flaws, but, in every case, doing the run at the fastest velocity possible. The aesthetics of the community are cool dipped in zero-degree chill: absolutely no emotes, no detours, no fakes, just the techno-aesthetics of high-skill performance: speedrunners doing the run in light-wave motion. Game developers do not necessarily like it. Speedrunners using bugs to achieve impossible lap times in *Super Mario Kart* is one thing, but exploits in online multiplayer games can require rushed patches at best, and ruined business plans at worst. It's Duchamp's *Glass*, then, as game running: outlaws and the law, code-breakers and codes unbroken, perfectibility and the imperfect, with the big prize waiting for speedrunners after a record-setting run nothing less than the sudden transformation of tightly scripted, meticulously coded games into zones of incommensurability, uncertainty, and indeterminacy. And why not? Who really wants to stay within the lines, live by the rules, die by the codes, bored by the sameness of technological perfectibility even when this is all prettied up multiplayer action scenarios? Not speedrunners for sure. They are metagamers, listening intently to the sound of running (code exploit) water from a supposedly foolproof dam just about to burst, hearing the high-pitched, nearly silent dog whistle given off by a vulnerability in the game just aching to be exploited, but all the while paying their respects to the logic of the game, running it from start to finish, looking, always looking, for that one unexpected window that is going to blast right through to the other side. Code punks.

Born in the shadow of Frankenstein, flanked by *Devs* and speedrunners as avatars of the future, with pathways already imagined in all their brilliance and grisliness by the artistic imagination, we are among

the first of all the generations to experience at first hand that fateful moment when we taught electrons to dance from atom to atom at our beck and call. We are biological and cerebral inheritors of that separate (electronic) way, having known no other pathway than flows, circuits, motion, and grounding. Jolted into life by the digital devices that surround us, seduced by light flashes from dense clouds of entertainment screens, circulating within social circuits, always in motion, never static, alternating between the determinism of data trash and the free will of hackers of the digital way, the ontology of electrons has now inhabited our psyche just as much as its flows in motion are the streaming culture that gives us sustenance. Apps of the electronic way, static (human) ground for dynamic energy in the wires, we are, for all that, still trans/formers – hinge experiences that bend electrons into history, that direct, as the Spanish theorist Manuel Castells has said, the power of flows into flows of power.⁴⁰ We have our artistic visionaries, blast aesthetics, apostles of free will, fervent believers in the singularity of determinism, and speedrunning code punks, but, for all that, we are, and will always remain, people no longer outside the looking glass but that fateful generation born, actually reborn, electronically within the looking glass. We are all now speedrunners disappearing, and then magically reappearing, for a living through the sparkling motion of electricity.

P Primordial Black Holes

All the black holes that astronomers have seen fall into one of three categories: stellar-mass black holes, intermediate-mass black holes, and super-massive black holes. Each is more massive than our Sun and formed at least hundreds of thousands of years after the Big Bang, as our universe grew and evolved.

But there is another type of black hole astronomers haven't yet seen, but think could exist. These are primordial black holes.

40 For a lucid application of this key insight to network society, see Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (London: Polity, 2012).

As their name suggests, primordial black holes were born very early in the life of the universe, a mere fraction of a second after the Big Bang. It was a time long before stars or galaxies (and other types of black holes) could exist. But some theories predict that primordial black holes should have popped onto the scene anyway. That's because in that fraction of a second after the universe itself began, space was not completely homogenous (the same at every point). Instead, some areas were denser and hotter than others, and these dense regions could have collapsed into black holes.⁴¹

If primordial black holes are so difficult to detect astronomically and, even then, can only be hypostatized into existence perhaps that is because they are actually all around us, having long ago fled the stellar regions for their own protection, taking up residence in the dark matter of human perception. Sometimes, it is probably true, weighing less than a paper clip, but at other times shape-shifting into different cultural forms: a painting intriguing on a museum wall, a broken guitar rhythm put down by a lonely busker on a busy city street, a lover's sigh, a YouTube video that haunts, and always the magical fabulation of an artist's imagination. Primordial black holes are just about anywhere when it comes to human perspective, like unexpected ripples in the fabric of normal time and ordinary space which have the effect of taking you down instantly, hard and irresistibly into insights dense, feelings complex, longings so longing that you know, just know, as you're fast-travelling through the vortex that somehow, somewhere that you're tumbling into the crushing density of a black hole primordial. Nowhere, of course, are primordia black holes more likely to be found than in the perspective crushing density that is the artistic imagination, that swirling vortex that in its most creatively intense expressions makes human perspective go to places it never wanted to explore and never thought to travel to, see things until then studiously avoided, just that point where past, present, and future lose their bearings like a compass spinning aimlessly atop a strong magnetic field, where normal perspective is ripped free of its frame of reference, and where we can know with trembling uncertainty that we are about to disappear down the primordial black hole of the artistic imaginary.

Like that early autumn day in Madrid pinned in the hot sun with heat rising up from the ground, just other pilgrims along the way,

41 Alison Klesman, "What Are Primordial Black Holes?," *Astronomy*, 10 July 2019, <https://astronomy.com/news/2019/07/primordial-black-holes>.

stuck in a long tourist line waiting impatiently for admission to the Prado Museum. Located at the intersection of memory and creativity in the Spanish imagination, the Prado had always been our long-awaited Jerusalem of the art world, with its gathering together of those brilliant upsurges of the painterly mind across the centuries, particularly Goya, Velázquez, Bosch, and Dali. To this day, we don't really know why we had to make this pilgrimage, but like itinerant travellers on the dusty roadways and labyrinths strange of the artistic imagination, some kind of persistent inner soul-pressure just kept whispering that there had to be, there just had to be, a Prado in our future. But cautious, like a counter-gradient to our own gradient, a wanderer unpredictable in the force field of our own lives, we took our time, not just to travel to the Prado, but once in Madrid, to actually visit it. Something in our sense-network just said that the real artistic spirit of Goya, Velázquez, Bosch, and Dali was probably not going to be found in antiseptic chambers of a museum with walls, but, if anywhere, most probably as living spirits still inhabiting Madrid, this beautiful city of lost dreams. To a certain extent, that was true. It was all a Prado kind of week, walking city streets packed, watching for signs of transformation contemporary. The signs of creative upsurge were clear, and they were everywhere: tens of thousands of profoundly inspiring young Spaniards coming by foot, buses, trains, and trams, sometimes singly but usually in enthusiastic groups of friends to join in the global day of climate protest; struggles against homelessness in tent cities scattered along the boulevards of power radiant and wealth glittering; mesmerizing, spontaneous street performances by a transsexual artist who just took the deep rhythms of traditional Spanish flamenco music right out of the cash-only tourist joints down the road and put its spirit of rebellion strong, daring, and provocative right down in dances awesome and seductive on the streets of Madrid – a tape music/live dance performance that lasted only for a few fast moments and then was quickly washed away by the rustles and hustles of a city always on the move. There was a lot of Goya in that dance performance just like there was a lot of the art of illusion of Velázquez in the revolt of the homeless against power that refused to show its face. And while the creative upsurge that was Dali could be seen once or twice that week dancing on all the rooftops of the imagination of the streets, the spirit of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* just came right out of its painterly triptych down Paseo del Prado, reproducing its panels in the daily heaven and hell, reward and punishment, and seduction and penance that was a city like Madrid's normal daily fare.

Nothing though prepared us for the Prado, for that moment when if luck has it you're just in the right mood to shape-shift right out of your earthly body with its heavy debts owed to the weight of gravitation, taking flight straight into the crushing (aesthetic) density of the primordial black hole that was the imaginary of those artistic fabulists of the future and dreamers of the past. We really don't know why it happened, but it did. Perhaps it was the after-effect of having our artistic expectations trimmed, shaped, and torqued by a week of searching for the spirit of the masters in the faces, bodies, and street life of a city dead-centre to everything and nothing. Or maybe it was a passing remark by Lynn Baron, a poet of the streets of desire and artist of dreams not yet asleep, who said almost to herself as we waited for admission: "Love the past for sure, and now to make way for the fresh past of the now and the future. What a footprint either way." Maybe it was that chance remark, perhaps it was the intensity of memories of a Madrid alive and vibrant with its own lost dreams, or maybe it was the grind of trying to appreciate artistic productions housed in the Prado through a dense matrix of cell phones, cameras, guards barking out warnings to stay within the lines, the constant flow of mass tourism within the museum. Well, we don't know what it was, but we do know that that day we just somehow managed to shrug off the gravity waves holding down our earthbound bodies and feel ourselves moving fast, very fast, into the primordial black hole that was the artistic imaginations of Goya, Velázquez, Bosch, and Dali. Strangely enough, we don't even think it was the paintings themselves. We already knew them all by heart. We had long drowned ourselves over and over again in the respectable, and sometimes, disrespectful texts of art history, reading and rereading, for example, every so insightful line in Michel Foucault's brilliant essay on Velázquez that introduced his book, *The Order of Things*. A fellow-traveller in the primordial black hole that was the doubled meaning of Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, Foucault made the decisive point that this was not just a painting within a painting, a painter painting himself in a mirror showing the painter painting a royal family portrait portrayed in the mirror, but was something much larger, convulsive, disorderly: namely a challenge to the classical order of representational meaning. For Foucault, in that time and in that painting, cracks began to appear in the order of artistic representation and with that the modern world suddenly surfaced and quickly zoomed into where we are now, an entire world driven on by the referential illusion at the heart of most everything: the mirror of Velázquez's painting as a talisman of the mirror of society

and perhaps the mirror, the living, breathing referential illusion, that we most certainly seem to be in in these, the most fantastical media drenched of times. No more unquestioned representations of the order of things, no more hegemony of all the great referentials – sex, consciousness, power, reason – but now just the irreality of a reality that is always a mirror within a mirror, a sliding, wildly oscillating cacophony of signs without necessary meaning, bodies without an anchoring ground, emotions like a territory without a map, images illusory, and technology itself fuelled by the energy of surrealism gone gritty real – the hyperreal.

But if it wasn't the actual paintings on the walls, what was it? What triggered on our part such a jolt of misrecognition, of suddenly being in a strange-place time and an altered-space space, when in the presence of the paintings? Perhaps it was our sense that we were not just in the presence of paintings by four artists whose aesthetic imaginations were long admired, but that there was something else present that day, an intuition, faint and first but then more insistent, that began to tell the story, namely that these artists had a shamanistic effect, conjuring up the spirit of something much more ancient than themselves, something that preceded their existence and would endure long after their deaths. And what was summoned up out of the spirit world, the real, unspoken world, are the spirits of the four humours: air, earth, fire, and water. And then we got it. We thought we had gone to see the painterly imagination on a sunstroke kind of day in Madrid, but what we actually tumbled down into was a rewriting of the periodic table of elementary (aesthetic) elements, with Goya as the artist par excellence of the cruelty of earth, Velázquez the painter of the air of referential illusions, Bosch the artist of watery flows of dreams of resurrection with its rapturous life and penal death, and Dali as the firestorm off to the side, not just an artist with the eye of a solar flare but a painter whose imagination draws everything else into the thousand campfires of his paintings burning with sadness, humour, critique, and to this day strange juxtapositions and molten dreams just dripping down all his painterly strokes. To make the point, it did not escape our attention that the paintings of Dali were safely sequestered in another art museum, the Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sofia, down the (aesthetic) street from the official art canon that is the Prado. Our immediate suspicion was that this gesture was as deliberate as its was unconscious, a necessary way of honouring the name of Dali in the Spanish imagination, but still removing him from the scene, like a suspect artistic enigma whose fire-energies once released would threaten to consume everything in

their path, like de Sade in France, the one prisoner of art's necessary perversity whom everyone refused to liberate from the Bastille; Royalists and revolutionaries alike in shock and then common revolt at the unimpeachable truth-value of his genuinely, and meaningfully, cynical moral futurism filtered through the order of (sexual) things. De Sade's prison house tried the most futile of all tasks – trying to keep his artistic imagination sequestered in a cell.

Dali's firestorm notwithstanding, there are infinities to learn from those pathways to the future that are Goya, Velázquez, and Bosch. Goya expresses in quintessentially painterly form the artist who is, to use the terms of the writer John Berger, a "vertical invader," an artist, that is, whose terrifying images of the theatre of cruelty that is earthbound politics and war capture the madness of power's upsurge onto the faces frenzied and contorted of royal families and nobilities all, and its downdraft as power inscribes itself by knives, swords, arrows, and torture on the bodies of the wounded and the damned. And Velázquez is the same. He was supposed to be a respectably talented court painter saving the honour of the (royal) name, except in the instance of *Las Meninas* he couldn't just resist the greater seduction of artistic perversity. Right there on a canvas otherwise nondescript, he had a small revolution of painterly illusion of his own, suddenly throwing off hundreds of years of representational logic where a painting is always a painting by inserting a mirror of a painter painting a painting and thus shoving himself first, and us later, into a brand new aesthetic era with its flows of resemblance, seduction, reversal, and, of course, twisting mirrors of illusion that are the aesthetic fabric of the (dis)order of things these days. Long before Michel Foucault's fabled writings of the late twentieth century, Velázquez knew in his heart of artistic hearts that a painting is not a painting, that representation is a necessary illusion to hold together the normal order of things, that all illusions are destined to have their windows to the soul broken, that there's a little surrealism in the very best and worst of things. Velázquez staked his reputation and, as it turns out, his life on this aesthetic gamble. Living in the shadowlands of the referential illusion at the heart of most everything today, inheritors of a society where all the icons have been toppled from their pedestals and where, in the ensuing confusion, the prevailing signs of the times move upward, downward, sideways, sometimes spinning without direction, sometimes inertial and miasmic, we can finally recognize that we are living in the cultural skin of *Las Meninas*, that Velázquez is also painting *us* in that mirror within a mirror. For better or worse, we are still inhabitants trapped in a society, a world signalled so clearly centuries in

advance by his artistic gesture of refusal of the normal order of things motivated, most probably, by his saving sense of aesthetic perversity. It is definitely no different with Hieronymus Bosch. He is a painter of a future still unfolding, still unknown, only decipherable in its terrifying meaning by an artistic imagination of the fifteenth century, a primordial (aesthetic) black hole that fully, fully absorbed the spirit of his (Christian) time and ejected its truth for us all to see in that most beautifully surrealistic of all paintings, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Faithful to the Trinitarian logic of his Christian times, the painting consists of three panels – a triptych. That is also where its conformity to respectable and acceptable Christian storytelling begins but also abruptly and decisively *ends*. Not for Bosch art in subservient service to the Christian sublime, but art now as a watery dreamland, a mediaeval confessor, of the deeply repressed Christian imagination. *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is a painterly descent into all the untold secret stories surrounding the pleasures and torments of sexual lust, the open hallelujahs to the transcendent sublime of the Holy Family. This incredible passion-pit of sexual repression, power, lust, cruelty, and messianic religious belief was jammed together into a Christian psyche gone mad with its own repressed desires, forbidden pleasures, and respectable, oh so respectable, public genuflecting on all the Sundays of its Christian life. *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is nothing less than a psycho-geography of the Christian mind which still haunts us to this very day. Many centuries later, five hundred years later to be exact, Guy Debord, a French theorist writing in the ruins of the society of the (Christian) spectacle, recommended the method of the *dérive* as a critical artistic strategy – walking randomly through city streets, senses always on high alert to what we are being taught by unexpected events, incongruous observations but also attentive to the silence of what is left unsaid, unexposed, never to be disclosed. A half millennium earlier, Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* had already put into actual practice a delirious *dérive* of Christian mythology: visualizing the ecstasy and punishments of sin, the pleasures of debauchery by beings half-animal/half-human, anuses poked, skin sometimes caressed, at other times flayed, sexual couplings multiple, with what look like space ships hovering over *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Everything in this painting is a visually stunning rendering of the erotic drives, empty power, cynical bodies, and sublime repressions that compose the narrative-line of Christian mythology. The boredom of heaven and the sheer outlaw, excessive fun of hell just looming amid the orgies and the flowers. In the technique of the triptych, what should have been a three-panelled painting depicting the rise, fall,

and rise again at the heart of Christian belief quickly dissolved into a visual rendition of sin and pleasure that resembles a science fiction vision of the future of the Christian psyche with its stunningly vivid flows of life and death, bodies trapped within bubbles, leering predators, female bodies always vulnerable, exposed, their sexual organs filled by any body or instrument close to hand. A hauntingly brilliant precession of aesthetic memory, every artist of the future who would walk and think and imagine in *The Garden of Earthly Delights* that was the Christian mind is already present in that painting: there is the surrealism of de Chirico's impossible perspectives, Magritte's floating objects, and Max Ernst's bird-like human flesh in all those bodies depicted in translucent, vaporous bubbles; there is de Sade's *Justine* in those desolate scenes of forced sexual copulation among the greenery; there is Italian futurism in those hovering space vehicles; and there is, most certainly, the spirit of Fluxus, of situationism gone psychologically interior in all those mediaeval painterly gestures which methodically, meticulously, cruelly turn Christian mythology inside out, exposing troubles to come, tracing the coldness of power in sex, literally lifting the aesthetic lid on the Christian redemption story as just another nihilism along the way. Savage animals among the Christian flowers, monstrous faces in strange places, benediction with prescribed curses, bright colours and even darker moods; a holy family cast in shameful sharp relief always looking the other way, to the heavens but never to the ground at their feet; holy passion for the inquisition that is *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. A watery grave for the graven image.

And then there is Dali, the fire-eater at the feast of the four humours: the avenging angel of the downtrodden human spirit, an artistic imagination with all the white-hot heat of a raging firestorm, a broken down Spanish body invested with all the powers for spilling out the secrets of the aesthetic holy spirit. His paintings also take the form of an imaginary triptych, with the panels this time stripped of Christian ritual and replaced by Goya, god the father putting down the anvil on hard truths about earthbound cruelties, Velázquez, a holy ghost painting that truth as the impossible mirror of society, and Bosch, god the son, mediating with every brushstroke the wasteland of all the holiness gone savage and the repressed human remainder left behind. Everything is there is Dali: water set on fire, air burning with despair, a rock solid, earthy world suddenly melting into liquid time. His artistic imagination picks up the ruined pieces of what's left after the psyche is exposed to that garden of horror-filled delights created by Goya, Velázquez, and Bosch. And why not? At the very centre of Dali's art, the animating force that

drives it on, the burning fuel that spends its creativity so indulgently, so carelessly, so beautifully wastefully, is that a brilliant, relentless spirit of *onanism* of the aesthetic (perhaps also of the sexual) kind is at the core of his imaginary. He said it himself. His self-confession is there for anybody to see. It's called *The Great Masturbator*, which is, in our estimation, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* for the twenty-first century. Here, the act of masturbation takes its hands off the body's sexual organs, entering directly into contemporary society as its energizing force. Not propagating anything, not really bothering anymore with endless, earnest accumulation, but just the opposite – bodies of the social, flesh of the political, skin of the commercial living lavishly on the pleasures of excess, of discharge without purpose, expenditure without the promise of dividends, voyeuristic, streaming, delightfully disordered, a whole scheme of things pleasurable, deeply pleasurable, beating their own meat. That's Dali's imaginary world, and now it is ours. With one eye on the future and many brushstrokes to the past, Dali literally paints his way to the open secret that everybody knows. That Goya's painterly voyage into savage lands is our present. That Velázquez's referential illusion at the disappearing heart of things is now steering the ship of state as well as the state of our minds delirious. And that Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is an early intimation of the dreamland, dark with its passions, bright with its imagery, and swirling with its bodies blended, that forms the horizon of our times. In the primordial black hole that is Dali's art, all this spins by faster and faster, like a house of liquid mirrors caught on a centrifuge out of control. A whirligig of psychic delirium for delirious times; liquid art for liquefying reality; an art of expenditure for a society of the future which is the everyday; an art dissolving into a new reality-principle that is always about the discharge, the blast, the pleasures of the release, the ecstasy of the destruction, the appetite for scavenging on the waste, the voyeuristic eye as a lurker in its anonymity. In Dali's art, time bends, objects are liquid, images are random, signs scatter to the stellar winds, women's bodies are prismatic, ants are crawling on the remains, prosthetics are everywhere, rolled up faces and constipated places abound, the world is tilting, spinning, doing crazy somersaults across the canvas, the fabric of space/time breaks down and we are left plunging into a primordial black hole that is an artist called Salvador Dali, and a form of art that just jams together the four humours of air, earth, fire, and water into the crushing density of the now. And, all this, on a hot summer day with the heat rising from the ground at the Prado of the Spanish imagination cut, of course, with that lonely artistic outrider from the Netherlands of our minds.

Quantum Bodies: From Louise Bourgeois and the Body Object to *Sirens* “III”

Bodies are always in revolt against being forced into three-dimensional space. And why not? Living at the edge of consciousness and finitude, we are multiverses. Always inhabited by many psychic worlds, we are multiple. And not just the geography of our minds, but our bodies, too, are n-dimensional, filaments of energy that spin, spiral, and swirl, organs with curvature, hormones that run at the speed of fast vectors, growth cells that are like starbursts, cancer cells that scale up exponentially, the life and death of matter similar to the cycle of finitude that is the human fate, with every speck of bodily matter containing its own unexpected black holes, its own gravity wells, its own deep space galaxies of disease and health and all the complications that lie between. Not an arid planet scorched by an unforgiving sun, the body overflows with liquids: circulatory flows of blood, life-sustaining water, excesses of piss, sweat, excrement, puss, and vomit. Nothing ever neatly separated, the body is connected in dense knots of biological relationships still not fully understood: nerves, blood, brains, tumours, bones, and skin with all that implies for the complexity that is pain, for the mysteries of life and death with the rise and fall of consciousness itself like the rhythms of nature in all the days of a singular human life.

With consciousness coming out of nothingness and fated at the moment of death to return to nothingness, the body is a beautiful quantum fluctuation in a fleeting moment of time – its vital energy irreplaceable, indispensable, never to be repeated. But during that precious moment of time, bodies are multidimensional, energized by hormones, coded by genetics, always spinning with undetected transformations, one instant robust with all the signs of apparent good health, suddenly struck by meteors of disease, inevitably disappearing into the stasis of silence that is death. Complexity is its basic alphabet, finitude its certain fate, and, all the while, enigmatic, energized, unpredictable with a life force that is vital, unconstrained, raging, loving, hating. Grief stalks it. Jubilation inspires it. Anxiety stirs it. Trauma breaks it. Hope lifts it. Uncertainty dreams it. Consciousness wakes it. Finitude terminates it.

Kiki Smith, Louise Bourgeois, Rebecca Horn, nichola feldman-kiss: four visionary artists of the quantum body, all women, all engaged in artistic practices formulated in the cracks, tracks, and raps of creative

body work, all with aesthetic nervous systems on hyperdrive, all with liquid consciousness alert to minute shifts along the spectrum of embodied life, all artists visualizing in painting, performance, photography, sculpture, and mixed media the basic alphabet of the quantum body.

Not only magnificent guides to a new way of thinking about bodies, these are artists who actually *enact* the quantum body with all its drives and desires, breakdowns and breakthroughs, overflowing liquids, organs unexpectedly changing their lines of flight, anxious dreams expressing themselves in tumours, traumas that go cancerous, good vibrations that harmonize in creative ululations, bodily gestures that are spider-like, faces as closed and open cages; women's bodies in all their trauma and healing, beauty and decay, becoming bird, machine, iceberg, victim, inquisitor; with hormones gone crazy, metastasizing cells, wet flows.

Their art doesn't start with the visible, but with a greater truth, with what the body actually is and has always been: a *pageantry of the invisible* – invisible desires, dreams, nightmares, aspirations, failures, desolations of anguish, rustles of sexual pleasure, aches of happiness, and pains of sadness. And not the body static either, but the body shifting, transforming, delirious in its excess, solitary in its suffering. Definitely gender-shifting, but something even more consequential: organs that mutate as the heart is worn on the face, muscles in the tone of a voice, nerves in bodily posture, a spiteful spleen in a glance, hormone surges in frenzies of desire, genetic traces in unlikely likeliness, arthritis in the swelling of the hand, nerve pain as a body supine on a lonely bed, skin stretched taut, sometimes slack, tattooed by the slow unfolding of bodily history, breasts that nourish life but are sometimes temples of death, dancing neurons as the intelligence of a body, an artistic woman's body, visualizing new pathways to the gateways of perception.

Like a nervous breakthrough, the deeply embodied imaginaries of these artists, their vital energies, are *produced* by their art. A form of liquid art that provides a visceral glimpse of the *interface* that we all are: blood, tissues, nerves, and bone for sure, but all this mixed with the greater uncertainties of a conscious mind, unsettled desires, and strings of longings, regrets, lingering arrivals and abrupt departures, the inception and eclipse of love, the stormy weather of hate; all this stamped on the body; all this just waiting for art to finally find a way of expressing the body of flows that we all are – flows of memories, flows of desire, flows of pain, and flows of solitude, but also flows that just leak out of the body, that bleed out of the body, that sweat out of the body, that are ejected by the body, that are metabolized by the body, that are absorbed by the body as healing balms and touches. Here, finally is art for bodies

scrambling with their multiple dimensions, for bodily flows like powerful streams that are sometimes blocked, emotional dams just waiting to burst their fleshly banks, for online eyes that absorb what hearts offline can't yet fully articulate, for real-time bodies to haunt the ghosts that exorcize it.

Kiki Smith: The Spectral Body

The body spectral? That's the body abject climbing out of the blister pack of four-dimensional space, becoming a haunting spectre of its own virtual existence. Sometimes a spectre of death such as Kiki Smith's sculptural figuration of abjection, *Untitled*, which features two life-size inert bodies, male and female, suspended on stakes, heads hanging down, semen dripping down the man's leg, milk flowing from the woman's breasts, their skin the colour of waxy clay mixed with a tinge of red ochre as a mournful funeral shroud.⁴² But not just death, but also life in its beautiful delirium where the virtual body proves its immense imaginative versatility by smashing the boundaries of species-being. In Smith's artistic vision, bodies are always haunted, and actually hunted, by powerful psychic archetypes. Like the menacing figure of the wolf straight out of mediaeval Nordic mythology, which enters the sexual metabolism of a woman's body with its howling copulation and, later, probably not satisfied with this enactment of forbidden sex across species boundaries does something more immensely possessive. The archetype of the howling, prowling wolf – the quintessential bad boy of the mythological world – actually becomes the woman. That's Smith beautifully scrawled drawing of *Wolfgirl*, where the face of the girl grows fur, grows ferocity, grows menace. This is all life along the spectrum of quantum fluctuations, where artistic visionaries like Kiki Smith visualize in evocative sculptures of bodies hanging mournfully and women transitioning into the mythic spirit of animality that species breakthroughs are just a phase transition away, that the strong force of life is psychic in its mythology, and that, when bodies reveal the secrets of their inner life, strange conjurations, haunting transgressions, and prowling along the borders of taboos are our likely fate. Here, imaginary phantasms from inner psychic-life sculptures of women stepping out of the bowels of animals, of women given birth by deer are played

42 Joseph Henry, "The Suffering Body of 1993: Whatever Happened to the 'Abject,'" MoMus, 27 April 2015, <https://momus.ca/the-suffering-body-of-1993-whatever-happened-to-the-aject/>.



Figure 23. Kiki Smith (b. 1954), untitled. © Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala.

on the surface of artistic productions for everyone to see, but something else is happening as well. The actual viscera of the inner body – tissue, organs, entrails – are suddenly externalized outside the body, with the body itself trapped in a web of its dangling remainders. Such as Smith's hauntingly unforgettable *Digestive System*, with the figure crawling on her hands and knees, trailed by a long flowing chain of her excrement, excremental remains of a body fully exposed, fully abject, fully without shame. As Duncan Ballantyne-Way writes in *fineartmultiple*:

In the 1990s, when America was still coming to terms with the AIDs epidemic, and female bodies had become a battleground over abortion rights, Kiki Smith's visceral, delicate and gruesome portrayals of the human form struck like a thunderbolt. Not just blood, flesh and bone, her human bodies were defecating, lactating corpses, spewing shit, piss, and menstrual blood.⁴³

43 Duncan Ballantyne-Way, "When Kiki Smith Remade the Human Body – In All Its Pus-Filled Glory," *fineartmultiple*, accessed 19 December 2022, <https://fineartmultiple.com/blog/kiki-smith-human-body/>.

When spectres take possession of bodies and objects, everything fluctuates, transgresses, mutates, women copulating with wolves, women birthed by animals, women becoming wolf, becoming excremental remainder, becoming animal, becoming woman, becoming resurgent.

Louise Bourgeois: Bodies as Flows of Regret, Longing, Traces of Trauma, Bright Fires of Desire

Received tropes surrounding the truly essential art of Louise Bourgeois is that of the suffering artist: traumatized in childhood by a father's infidelity, she translated "fear, anxiety and loneliness" into "mythological and archetypal imagery, adopting spirals, spiders, cages, medical tools, and sewn appendages" to evoke the "feminine psyche, beauty and psychological pain."⁴⁴ In the usual way of artistic creativity, that may or may not be the case – a comforting, one-size-fits-all psychological reduction or a really clever, necessarily unconscious, artistic sublimation. Or, perhaps both simultaneously. A satisfying, beautifully isomorphic, psychological fable of individual trauma, pain, and creative resurgence and, at the same time, precisely the reverse, namely a psychological origin story that functions as an aesthetic *mise-en-scène*, directing attention away from what is really at stake in her work – the rising horizon of the bodily future. In this case, to brush up against the art of Louise Bourgeois is to be suddenly in the visceral presence of an artist who is actually *produced by her work*, whose artistic imaginary provides a new skin for her virtual body, whose art evokes in wondrous detail the interfaces that we all are: blood, tissue, longings, regrets, love, and whimsy, traces of trauma, bright fires of desire. Above all, her art is the art of flows, mutations, transformations. Gigantic metallic spiders that are the landscape of their own dreams, twisting spirals brimming with murderous violence, complicated cages as traces of memories lost in swirls of repression but carefully preserved in jars of resentment, stunningly seductive woven organs and exteriorized, distended body parts, swollen bronze-cast penises carried in the crook of the artist's arms, large-scale installations that function both as "cells" of memories on indefinite repeat and execution chambers for traumatic memories gone terminal, and, finally, readymades in the tradition of Marcel Duchamp but, this time, objects visibly traced with words of love. In the words of Elaine Showalter, literary critic and feminist, the art of Louise

44 For an overview of the artistic work of Louise Bourgeois, see particularly: "Louis Bourgeois," The Art Story, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/bourgeois-louise/>.



Figure 24. Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, 1999, cast 2003 bronze, stainless steel, and marble, 927 x 891 x 1024 cm. Purchased 2004, National Gallery of Canada. © The Easton Foundation / Vaga at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / Socan, Montreal (2022)

Bourgeois is that of “lumps, bumps, bulbs, bubbles, bulges, slits, turds, coils, craters, wrinkles and holes.”⁴⁵ Which is definitely the case. This is liquid art for the body immaterial. This is art for organs without bodies, and bodies with permeable boundaries, fluid interfaces. This is, ultimately, art for bodies dissolving into flows: flows of childish memories, anger, jealousy, resentment of course, but all this fully and intensely absorbed and then swept away in flowing streams of searing artistic creativity, recombinant imaginary, and the bringing into visibility of all the soiled material, weathered skin, organs mutant, fluctuating memories, dreams transformational, and aesthetics immaterial that are the brilliant artistic legacy of Louise Bourgeois.

45 Elaine Showalter, Tate, 25 June 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-11-autumn-2007/lumps-bumps-bulbs-bubbles-bulges-slits-turds-coils-craters-wrinkles>.

Rebecca Horn: Body Metamorphosis

Image removed at the request of the rights holder

Figure 25. Rebecca Horn, *Concert for Anarchy*, 1990. © Rebecca Horn. Photo credit: Tate Gallery.

Rebecca Horn is the artist par excellence of the prosthetic body: bodies that slip their corporeal boundaries to become dazzling combinations of prosthetic signs. Here, bodies suddenly elongate the fixed geography of arms and legs through mechanical extensions to become gigantic spidery creatures; bodies reskinning themselves with beautiful swirls of feathers; bodies putting on the skin electric with technological prosthetics, thus accurately anticipating bodies of the future as what they already are in actuality – highly charged protrusion relays in the society of connectivity, part device/part flesh. The body prosthetic, then, transformed into fabulous fetish, beautiful camouflage, powerful extension, seductive fashion adornment. With this, the body becomes the prosthetic of its unconscious dreams: immaterial, fluctuating, its boundaries permeable, its identity that of a fabulous shape-shifter. And that's the

point of Horn's artistic vision. The body prosthetic occupies a space of liminality, neither pure corporeal body nor innocent prosthetic, but something else – the opening up of a new zone of psychic immateriality, fully ambivalent, incongruous, incommensurable. In effect, what is witnessed in Horn's performances is nothing less than an art of the doubled sign. The body prosthetic is both haunting talisman of a yet unknown future and memory trace of unconscious desires long repressed. Definitely ambivalent because Horn's artistic articulation of the language of the prosthetic works to undermine all received, settled knowledge concerning bodily boundaries, whether with machines, nature, or with its own complicated desires. Certainly ambiguous because the aesthetic effect of Horn's visual perspective is to overwrite the codes of the stubbornly grounded body, making of the body a delirious sign of its own aesthetic imagination. And fully incommensurable because Horn's vision of the body prosthetic has probably arrived too soon to be appreciated for the radical deconstruction of the future that it portends; and too late because her vision of bodies disappearing into delirious signs – signs of transformation, extinction, playfulness, extrusion – functions now only as a haunting afterimage of the actual collapse of clearly recognizable bodily boundaries in the twilight days of modernity, with all the flaring flumes of psychic debris as its waste-product – the street politics of the hysterical male with its angry reaction-formation and desperate search for hardened borders, whether of panic bodies, wounded egos, or threatened states.

As if to make the point that the material body as we have always known it has now mutated into the immateriality of the spectral world, that we live now as fully possessed individuals, Horn's artistic productions shift from human bodies as their key focus to a universe of floating objects saturated with the secrets of alchemy. In her installations, the era of automated machines achieves its aesthetic crescendo. With engineering exquisite in the subtlety of its detail and artistic design seductive in its sheer beauty, automated machines come alive as art machines painting deeply evocative pictures, summoning floating souls into tangible human presence, moving ballets of knives through the emptiness, playing violins in an orchestra of androids, spraying light waves inside the belly of a whale, stirring ashes, fluttering the wings of mechanical butterflies, and flapping the pages of an unread book. Everything that surrealism tried to undermine in the age of modernity, namely to rebel against the solidity of the name – the realism of objects and subjects – has achieved its moment of completion in the artistic productions of Rebecca Horn. Except, rather than simply disrupt the visual codes of painting as in the works of de Chirico, Magritte, Ernst,

and Dali, Horn does something more aesthetically ambitious, namely to draw out the fabulously manic irreality at the centre of everything in the age of cinematic culture. In her artistic imaginary, the world is born again in the bright lights of cinematic illusion, with its play of shadows, quick reversals, and mesmerizing motion. This is surrealism for the age of the hyperreal, where automated machines are brought onto the stage of artistic performance only to perform with such intensity and precision that they are finally forced to reveal their secret possibilities for alchemical transformation, specifically that harmony and anarchy are alternating frequencies in the order of things, and that boundaries between machines, humans, and nature are fully permeable. What is this, then, but an ecology of surrealism, a form of art that always works to sign-switch anything it touches? Here, a woman wearing a mask like a player in the theatre of sadomasochism suddenly finds the mask transformed into an eerie writing machine; empty suitcases flap open and shut like the wings of a butterfly; faces are hung with clouds of feathers; the frames of empty beds are covered with bird-like automata in constant motion; water pours down on a field of abandoned boots; a lonely book nestles in a bird's nest with a floating ball rotating back and forth in the silence of a haunting tableau. Surrealism for sure, with objects coming alive, subjects splitting apart into the multiplicities they always were, perspective animated by the delirious order of the virtual, automated machines finally speaking and when they do their choice is clear – harmonies of a greater ecology cut randomly with energizing bursts of anarchy.

Like *Concert for Anarchy*, featuring a grand piano, hung high in the air, upside down, its internal mechanisms spilling out of its like suspended entrails, and the whole music machine set in motion periodically, shuddering and vibrating, to the tune of a timer set to random. When spectres take possession of bodies and objects, everything fluctuates, transgresses, mutates; pianos fall upward out of ceilings high above, music in ruins but still the machine vibrates with the sounds of anarchy. Finally, an artistic vision of shape-shifting as the key frequency of spectral reality with both physical objects and human subjects refusing to play their assigned significations. A woman's body becomes unicorn in a farmer's field; a piano floats up to the ceiling, spills its guts, and still the music plays on; a performance artist becomes the degree zero of feathers that it was thought were always at one (prosthetic) remove; an artist becomes the technological extensions of her own imaginary.

What is this but an image of the sublimity and terror of the virtual self?

**nichola feldman-kiss: Bodies of Scapegoats,
Sounds of Ululation**



Figure 26. nichola feldman-kiss, *an initial aversion to the plight of the sufferer \ Scapegoat/Sydné*. Courtesy of the artist.

It's different with the artistic vision of nichola feldman-kiss. She is a rider of the vortex, just that point in the electrified whirlpool of contemporary life where transcendence meets desolation, redemption mingles with the persistence of cruelty, indifference is undermined by an ethics of artistic responsibility. The result is rainbows in the rain, an art of sunrise at earthly dusk, a photography of hope for sombre times. Consider two of her most recent artistic installations: *an aversion to the plight of the sufferer (Scapegoat)* and *Siren III*.

The most primal, intense expression of the uncanny in twenty-first century life? That's *an initial aversion to the plight of the sufferer (Scapegoat)*.

Everything is there intense, searing, and beautiful: a striking photograph of a young woman, blue sky and green vegetation in the background, clutching a kid goat as if life itself, a haunting series of photographs of young men holding in their arms piles of bones luminescent in their bleached whiteness, with the photographic series itself aesthetically organized from left to right by what Franz Fanon described as the most accidental and unimportant of all human distinctions – the tones of human skin colour, from dark to light. Everyone depicted in the series is a scapegoat. Sometimes scapegoated by the accident of birth: geographical isolation, bottom rung in global hierarchies of class and wealth, humiliated by persistent gender divisions, the storm winds of fate that is ethnicity as a birthright or birth-sentence. At other times, scapegoated by the studied designs of cynical power: precarious employment, dispossession by privileged machineries of medicine, exclusion from adequate housing, ubiquitous police surveillance, arbitrary arrest, capricious detention, always silenced from a greater visibility.

A truly complex photographic installation, the images intersect at the centre of two primal mythologies in Western culture: the sacred scapegoat and sacrificial violence. Here, the mythology of the sacred scapegoat, common to Babylonian, Jewish, and Christian traditions, is retold in a dramatically new way. Focusing on the kid goat in the young woman's arms, the photographic imaginary at work here does not tell the traditional story of the goat as that which is to be sacrificed to the gods for the symbolic appeasement of the sins of the community, but brings into (photographic) visibility a long forgotten story about sacrificial ceremonies, namely that the act of sacrifice always involved not one, but two, goats – one to be physically sacrificed, and the other – a kid goat – which was to be liberated as a hopeful sign of possible human emancipation. That is the redemptive moment in this photographic rendering of the act of sacrificial violence: the kid goat held in the young woman's arms, her eyes closed, blue skies above, and a luxuriously green landscape all around. The myth of sacrifice is reversed from violence to peace, from symbolic punishment to sacrifice.

It's the very same with the photographic images of young men with bones, all situated by order of their chromatic place in hierarchies of skin colour. Certainly, all the symbolic rituals associated with traditional mythologies of scapegoating are powerfully represented here. *Scapegoat* has as its dominant photographic subject matter young men of colour, staring directly into the lens, all singular, all indispensable beings in the world, all ordered visually by their most accidental, dispensable feature – skin colour. What they have in common, in addition



Figure 27. *an initial aversion to the plight of the sufferer (Pietà)*, 2015–2022, *Scapegoat*, 2022 (Kevon) © nichola feldman-kiss. Copyright Visual Arts-CARCC, 2022.

to the implicit politics of racialization that plays out in all in the hard streets of cruelty and dispossession, are bones cradled in their arms – skeletal remains, this time not for medical exhibitions but repurposed by an artistic imagination with a larger mythological purpose. Bleached white, luminescent, and jumbled, the skeletal remainders are refigured as part of a funeral oration. Not delivered by words over a gravesite, the oration is delivered photographically. There are no sounds, no speeches sorrowful, no gathering of mourners. The form of the oration is entirely visual, and its meaning is saturated with the sounds of desolation. The pile of bones held in the arms of the young men are remaindered objects of a more persistent dispossession – the rising into life of the individuals remaindered in those jumbles of bones experience a second death, not

physical this time, but ontological – their unique identities in life unrecorded, their memories disappeared, their lasting fate to be archived, commodified, and abused even after death. Desultory images of bones, then, as an outward sign of the price exacted by the play of power and commerce on the scapegoated bodies of the living and the dead. This is a funeral oration marking the rites of sacrificial violence, with the photographic images a covering shroud.

With this twist. Following the profound insights of the French philosopher René Girard in his book *Violence and the Sacred*,⁴⁶ the scapegoat mechanism with its mimetic violence is often a game of the doubled other, with the question of identity itself – victim and executioner – rendered fully ambiguous and ambivalent in detail and definition. That's definitely the case here. On one take, the young men with bones are powerfully symbolic of the politics of deprivation, with their bodies placed on the bitter scale of the exchange-value of skin colour, the bones in their arms intimations of a future cold in its debasement. But, on the other hand, the young men physically gather the remaindered bones in their arms, and by that fateful act, bring the violence of scapegoating into human presence by the witness-giving of photography. And by that simple act, the sacrificial mechanism with its pre-prepared *an initial aversion to the plight of the sufferer*, is reversed in its meaning. Not passive scapegoats nor resigned victims, but visually animated, highly energized images of young men turning directly into the storm centre of suffering by holding the remains of the (colonial) day in their arms, a meeting of the souls of living and dead in an elemental memorial to the hard winds of colonized bodily history. With that, the scapegoat mechanism is cancelled by human solidarity, racial defacement by the uniqueness and strength of individual human demands for meaning. And something else as well. *Scapegoat* doesn't involve just a play of doubled identities, but actually *tripled* identities – our own as well at the moment we become active witness to the art of the scapegoat, and, thereby, are implicated ethically – immediately and intensely – in the larger question concerning (our own) aversion or not to the plight of the sufferer. Meticulous in its craft production, mythological in its depths, this is one photographic installation that makes of photography an act of ethical complicity: bearing witness and assuming responsibility. Here, the unmistakably lucid language of photography brings visibility to those rendered invisible, honours the nameless, thus giving visual

46 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

expression to surges of solidarity and hopes for redemption, turning the enduring arc of violence and scapegoating into acts of overcoming, first within ourselves and then within society at large, despite *an initial aversion to the plight of the sufferer*.

It's just the opposite with *Siren III*.⁴⁷ Here, there is no scapegoat, only underwater photography of an iceberg drifting in the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean off the rocky coast of Newfoundland; no visible suffering, only transcendent, rising sounds of ululation by a group of diasporic women, émigrés of many different stories, many different countries spanning Africa, the Middle East, the Levant; no piles of bleached bones, only underwater photography rendered with such intensity that it actually reveals the hidden skeletal structure of the iceberg; and definitely no human figures, only the liquid sky above, the iceberg shedding trapped bubbles of ancient air slowly rising to the surface, with everything dissolving aesthetically into the colours of the spectrum. Conceived *psychologically* from the pain of a woman's trauma, the hopefulness of *Siren* is an aesthetic counterpoint to the artist's autobiography where, like many women artists before her, her creative energy has persisted, in fact accelerated, in spite of masculinist indifference and violence of racial erasure. Conceived *politically* from the artist's active involvement in support of the rights of asylum-seekers held in indefinite detention in Canada's prisons of injustice, *Siren* is the art of collective women's solidarity: the solidarity of women combining the many different styles of ululation into a common chorus of transcendence; the solidarity of young women artists working together in the solidarity of carefully mentored arts studio practice to digitally render photographic images and sonic sounds of *Siren*; and that unspoken solidarity of an isolated woman artist, asylum-seekers, and their vulnerable families that makes of *Siren* not just a talisman of hope in grim times, but a complex public biography of a form of art that rises directly out of the complicated fabric of personal trauma and social injustice, which also chooses to respond by transforming specific artistic practices involved in the making of an arts installation itself, with all its intangible flights of creative imagination, embodied solidarities and slippages among realities – video space, digital space, watery space, the anxious space – into new pathways to a better future. *Siren* is the inspiring ethics of the quantum world in the fullness of its fluid motion.

Kiki Smith bears witness to the abject body; Louise Bourgeois gives haunting expression to bodies as flows of regret, longing, traces of

47 <https://www.nicholafeldmankiss.com/>.

trauma, bright fires of desire; Rebecca Horn performs body metamorphosis, and nichola feldman-kiss? She is the artist of bodies of solidarity. Sometimes the unwanted solidarity of bodies of colour brought onto the stage of history to play the racially designated role of scapegoat in a global political theatre of cold cynicism, but, at other times, the solidarity of voices raised in ululation, the solidarity of visual images of streams of bubbles of water rising to the sunlit surface of the water like palpable signs of transcendence, the solidarity of young women artists working together to render underwater photography into haunting digital animations, and, above all, the solidarity of an artist, like nichola feldman-kiss, who refuses easy political reductions or lingering psychic resentment in favour of doing what quantum art always does best – translating the hard labour of bodily experience, personal trauma, attunement to the larger injustices of the times, into something totally unexpected. That's *Siren*, which brings together the never before brought together – a drifting iceberg, underwater photography, a chorus of ululations, and exquisite digital rendering – into a hymn to the hopefulness of creative human transformation.

But that's not to say that this art installation is not uncanny. It definitely is since we would do well to remember the lessons of ancient mythology that the seduction of the sirens always had about it a doubled quality: lulling sounds of seduction for sure, but also, at the same time, sounds that could be so sweet and true because they were meant to lure unsuspecting sailors in the darkness of night onto hidden reefs and jagged rocks. Thus, the question remains: for all the smooth beauty of its images and the seductive sound of its ululations, what dangerous accident lies in wait for those following the sounds and sights of this the most recent iteration of the enduring myth of the ancient sirens? In the quantum world, perversity is always just a jagged edge away from hopefulness, solidarity runs at the edge of caprice. That's the real secret of its seduction. And perhaps something else as well. In the end, the lasting appeal of all four artists – Kiki Smith, Louise Bourgeois, Rebecca Horn, and nichola feldman-kiss – may be that there are artistic conjurations of the secret of the sirens – luring us unexpectedly by the sheer psychic energy, aesthetic incommensurability, and boundary crashes of their artworks beyond the safety of four-dimensional space into the delirious danger of the multiverses that we are, beyond and into the whirlpool of the vortex: bodies of abjection, regret, longing, desire, despair, metamorphosis – the uncanniness of solidarity cut with a twist of beautiful perversity.

The truth of their art is to be found in their studio practices that they all wear like a second skin. Louise Bourgeois's art practice was as austere

and rigorous as the contrasting fluidity of her art, her studio crammed with delirious fables, strange objects, its every nook and cranny chock full of creative bricolage, parables of the past, probes of the future. It is the same with feldman-kiss, whose art studio embedded in the belly of the urban city earth has liquid crystal walls, digital animation for a ceiling, and a floor cluttered with aesthetic excess – neon aphorisms, LEDs, living photography, light that crackles with electric energy, and all this with an ironing board for a desk, a Buddha shrine complete with candles and whispering pagan gods in the corner – small windows opening to city streets alive with drifting city sounds of party voices, slumping bodies drunk on the doorstep, psychic healers, any age spiritualists of body and mind. Just a perfect studio setting for drift photography which catches the drift of the world between the harvested bones and bodies of the youthful perfection of *Scapegoat* or catches the drift of nature in *Siren* with its flows of water, icebergs, jellyfish, with fate unpredictable, results uncertain. If you could do photography from deep outer space with a camera tuned to the spectrum of aesthetic creativity, I have no doubt that the art studios of Smith, Bourgeois, Horn, and feldman-kiss, with their surges of creativity, space-shifting perspectives, and artistic filaments of energy would throw out brilliant sparks in the night-time sky, easily outshining the bright lights of their inhabited cities, each day renewing ancient bonds between stars above and art below, with bodies of artists as sensitive frequencies in-between.

R Scorpio Rising

Walking along the ocean shore, low tide, mackerel sky, deserted except for flocks of migrating birds returning north from winter in the sunshine, circling seagulls, and a family of seals coming into shallow water, probably to catch a better look at their human companion species.

The horizon of our walk was aesthetic, but its destiny turned out to be time itself, that strange conjuration where the work of art sometimes turns time itself inside out, reversing the order of things, disappearing the significance of a culture always on quick-time and privileging by that very refusal the lasting importance of the work of art as a marker

of endurance. Slow art, slow time for a society yearning to vanish into spectacles of its own desires.

By accident, we found the artwork, an exquisite stone carving chiselled in hard granite on the ocean shore, a deserted space, quiet except for the rhythm of the waves, far from the usual beach trails, the only busyness the sound of wind and falling shadows announcing the setting of the day. The granite boulder itself was located at the base of an ancient Garry oak growing out of a beachside hill, beautifully gnarled, its roots spiralling downward and sideways into the earth, the sand, the water; its bark serrated, its trunk twisting and dividing, its branches rising to the sun. And the stone carving itself? A simple but deeply evocative image of the ancient astrological sign of Scorpio rising: a scorpion with its doubled pincers reaching out to a beautiful heart that almost seemed to be slipping away, a powerful symbol of love seaward bound, elusive, just beyond the grasp of pincers closing.

The stone carving was in the shape of a diving bell, with clear internal divisions between sun, land, and water. Not a bottle with a message washed up on a lonely beach, but a granite boulder remade by the artistic imagination into a diving bell carved in stone with a fully enigmatic meaning. The stone carving definitely did not solicit attention. Its emotional strength seems to lie precisely in its obscurity: a found object which, once found, challenges the finder to descend into the playful enigma – why the lobster reaching out to a heart of stone? Why the diving bell carved in granite? Why the very deliberate obscurity in its placement? And why this beautiful entanglement of astrology, granite, trees, and water at the ocean's edge?

If hard granite could talk, if the Garry oak tree could speculate, and if the stone carving could finally speak for itself, then they might mention that this found artwork is almost perfect pitch in terms of the aesthetics of balance and harmony. The stone carving faces directly towards the ocean, and its very visibility and invisibility depends on the rising up and going down of the tide, on the ferocity of winter storms blowing in from the sea, on the slow growth of barnacles on the granite boulder, on the fast spread of seaweed on the sheltering shore. An art of deep ecology then, carved in the medium of stone for full immersion in those other media always present at the meeting of ocean and land – liquid media of water, earth, and air. Literally, this is the art of a medium within a medium. An artwork that does not represent anything at all but evokes something much more ineffable in its meaning. The very obscurity of the stone carving calls into presence the awesome singularity of its natural surroundings: a stone carving on a granite boulder nudged



Figure 28. Photo credit: Lynn Baron.

up against an ancient tree, and all these boundary-points for the meeting of earth, air, and water.

And something else as well. And that has to do with the artist's choice of granite as the medium. Not fabricated paper, not a digital stream, not a sonic vibration, but something rock hard and in that hardness enduring. Enduring through time and space. Long after individual lives have run their passages, long after shorelines have bent at the insistence of powerful seas, probably long after galaxies have spun out their spiral arms, and certainly long after the society of glittering spectacles has

faded away into its own screen-death, this image of a lobster failing to grasp a heart of stone will endure. Just perfect for a heart carved in stone under the astrological sign of Scorpio, a carving that rises and falls in visibility according to the movement of the ocean tides, a carving that fully absorbs the water sign that is Scorpio, the eighth sign in the zodiac, a carving that endures, sustains, transforms through cycles of death and rebirth.

Slow art for the slow time and slow space that is stone carving of life itself.

S Streaming SuperString

Filaments of Energy

What would happen if we were to turn our eyes from the stars above – the movement of distant galaxies, bursts of starlight, and deep gravity wells of black holes – to that other universe within and around us, the world of the subatomic, the micro-universe of elementary matter with its ceaseless movement of particles and forces? And what if reaching beyond cosmological visions such as Einstein's theory of relativity that facilitated human understanding of the laws of the macro-world above with its galactic curvatures, bends, and twists in the fabric of spacetime, we listened intently to the frequencies of the micro-world, to what, in effect, that mysterious world of microparticles, the indivisible world of elementary matter – neutrons, photons, leptons, bosons, electrons, fermions – have to tell us about the meaning of life today? And what would happen if in the act of listening to the sounds of the subatomic, we were to discover something radically new, namely that the universe of particles and forces around us are always *strings, twisting filaments, of pure energy*, vibrating, pulsating, changing frequency, sometimes harmonizing into beautiful symmetries, sometimes disintegrating into chaotic disharmonies? And what if one day we were to stumble upon the secret of life itself as carefully coded in the vibrations of the subatomic? It would reveal to us that life tends towards the indifference of symmetry; that pure energy vibrates to the sound of other sites of pure energy; that this vibration of pure energy, with its ups and downs, its

closed and open loops, sometimes just breaks right through to the other side of superstring symmetry; and that, in effect, the still unexplored world of the micro has a song to sing of life as beautiful vibrations, chaotic reverbs or sometimes just the empty tone of no direction home. Who in our contemporary universe of three-dimensional space plus time, other than, perhaps, migrant mystics of the life within or vagrant pilgrims in deserts distant, would have the temerity or, perhaps, the imaginative capacity, to think life in ten, eleven, twenty-seven different dimensions, to think thoughts true about the consequential results of the immaterial? They may consider the possibility that the lasting cultural consequence of digital reality will just turn out to be its role as a fast-moving, immensely transformative delivery system for translating the wonders, mysteries, and desolation of what scientists like to call superstring symmetry into the elementary matter of social life. If we catch the beat of superstring symmetry, pure energy always speaks to pure energy, matter vibrates, particles and forces reverse into filaments of energy, not discrete, but liquid, flowing, with frequencies changing – the universe as a fantastically entangled cosmos of pure vibrations, pure energy, pure symmetry.

Until, of course, it's not. Like that moment when the elementary forces of nature, the explosive power of the atom was twisted by destructive human alchemy into nuclear flashes of violent energy with the inevitable fallout of agonic suffering, dead flesh, cities in ruins, and a world gone suddenly disharmonic in its ethics, with no symmetry to its visions austere, traumatized, and terminal. When superstring symmetry comes alive, when life opens to other dimensions of experience unsuspected, then we can also know that nature is indifferent in its purposes, random in its consequences – vibrating matter careless of its (human) ends, filaments of energy beyond good and evil.

Immateriality Resurgent

In the physical universe understood as pure, vibrating energy, the irreducible essence of matter is its radical immateriality. When electronic technology scales up to social media, superstring theory is no longer a matter of speculative mathematics but now becomes the essence of digital experience. Everything in social media is beautifully *micro*: strings of discrete particles of information dispersing everywhere like stellar dust that gets in our eyes, on our minds, in our emotions; strings of forces, weak or strong, that ride the universe of social media like powerful psychic vectors, attracting attention, animating debate, looping images,

bodies, and feelings. No longer a solid world of absolute matter, social media literally vibrates with energy, powerful perturbations taking the shape of social memes, going viral, changing frequencies, surging exponentially, disappearing with a (digital) thud, elastic in their movement, shifting meanings, moving from margins to the very centre of things in an instant. No longer a world of fixed, immutable dimensions, social media plunges us into a still unexplored world of n-dimensions, where no one truly understands the many new dimensions of human perspective, imagination, and emotions opened up by the intersection of multiple streams of vibrations – images, texts, videos, memes – flowing through vision, feelings, and consciousness, making of us sites of violent perturbations, bodies in the data storm tracked, mapped, and stacked by streams of discrete information and vector forces quickly circulating. Digital bodies, then, as filaments of energy sparkling with the tone of the electronic universe, overwhelmed with the velocity of the flux, or perhaps, just going silent for survival like a tuning fork running out of energy – an empty tone without a tune of its own.

Nothing is stable in this world of closed and open loops of information, closed and open strings of memes, images, and texts. Everything is probabilistic, on the move, swirling in dense clusters of information, suddenly spiralling outward string-like, and just as swiftly compressing into hard kernels of viral narratives that spread out in the form of gigantic, gaseous membranes of new stories, new memes, new ways of scaling up exponentially, new sparks to which the many strings of digital life attach themselves for a moment, only to just as quickly to detach, decouple, disconnect. No longer Marshall Berman's inspiring vision of *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*,⁴⁸ but now something even more magical yet disconsolate: the air begins to vibrate electronically, matter melts down into flows of information, the collective psyche moves on the rails of powerful media vectors, all that is stable disappears into a receding horizon of unpredictable perturbations, twists of meaning, spirals of data flows stretching, folding, bending, open and closed often at the same time. We now live superstring, each and every beautifully complicated digital day. But the question remains: Who has the courage for that? Who will walk the road of embodied life conceived as a filament of energy unsympathetic to human purposes, its symmetry without fixed trajectory – immaterial vibrations indifferent to human imagination and purpose?

48 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010).

Reading the Signs

Forget the macro, concentrate on the micro. Like this early spring day, when we decided to make ourselves test sites for life in the superstring. Our prejudices are clear. For some time, we have been dissatisfied with a world of fixed dimensions. It is not that we have anything particularly against the space/time fabric into which we were born, raised, and grown to maturity. Its dimensions of height, length, and width plus time have spelled out the hard numbers defining the dimensions of objects surrounding us, sort of like a comforting gravity blanket keeping everywhere in its proper place, defining spatial arrangements, an elegant spatial abstraction that shapes the contours of human perception. But for all that, our refusal of a world of fixed dimensions is probably as much private autobiographical as it is a matter of public biography. After all, we were born in the shadow of nuclear conflagration, several weeks after the dropping of atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. For ourselves, the tragic mythic meaning of this event, signalling as it did the literal end of history, has clouded our lives. At the very moment of the beginning of our pilgrimage through life as human beings, the technological development of atomic weaponry and the political decision to test its powers of dissuasion on an Asian nation, and, with that, to assume human control over history itself – to decide whether humanity as species-existence will thrive or die – was, for better or worse, our particular historical condition. We were born atomic. We were born precisely at the moment when the old world of length, width, and height became meaningless, with the sudden addition of many new dimensions to the human equation – flows of atomic energy, blasts of atoms, fusion of weapons from the sky and burning flesh on the earth, the meltdown of past into future, the blinding flash of light, rainfalls of radiation, the instant mutation of elementary matter into strange shapes, abject configurations of power and vulnerability, life itself transformed into a zombie land of the living dead with the flash of the nuclear age. Everything rising now like that ominous, spiralling mushroom cloud in the sky when the blast of the atomic smashed apart the universe of fixed dimensions, fixed meaning, fixed history, fixed time.

And not just that, our lifetimes have also witnessed another truly radical transformation in human affairs, the consequential results of which are still radiating everywhere in their unpredictability, complexity, and (wireless) magic. Our common fate as riders of the data storm may have begun at the end of the twentieth century, but the digital vortex is the essential signal of life in the twenty-first century, drowning out all the

accompanying noise, imploding everything in its path, melting down meaning into data, society into networks, discrete particles of information into streams of algorithmic patterns, three-dimensional space into multidimensional real time. All that was previously stable in business, shopping, medicine, education, music, cinema, transportation melts down into liquid flows of data. Networked society with its wired individuals suddenly streamed at light-speed, zoomed at maximum velocity, archived in its particulars, connected in its generalized emotions – a constant flow of likes and dislikes, political turbulence globalized, data storms clouding our skies, the rise and fall of the tide of events illuminated, archived, and measured by a digital sun that never sets.

Blended reality, blended bodies, blended feelings: that is what happens when we pass right through the looking glass of the digital portal. The elementary universe of matter becomes the algorithmic universe of the radically immaterial: flowing, streaming, mutating, vibrating, probabilistic in its effects, unpredictable in its consequences. Ironically, it may well turn out that the real killer app of digital reality is its transformative cultural function as a delivery system for superstring theory, for making that which was previously advanced scientific theory a normal and unnoticed part of the alphabet of digital life; for transforming a radically new vision of reality – the previously invisible world of micro-reality where strange things happen all the time, where matter vibrates, sound ululates and information moves like flashing, circulating strings of waves and particles – into the elementary codes of the society of (digital) connectivity. When the power of cybernetics smashes into earthly space and time, the result is as unreal as it is immaterial. The traditional fabric of three-dimensional space and time dissolves into the n-dimensional world of electrons, neurons, and photons moving the human species at light-speed towards destinations unknown, uncertain, fully enigmatic. Data mapping replaces tape measures, space is reterritorialized by technological platforms, and temporality itself transformed into the abstract integers of real time. The seduction of the immaterial is present everywhere, from insurgencies of cryptocurrency – Bitcoin, Ethereum, and all the rest – and blockchains as the new system of universal exchange-value to the modelling of society through public policy moving at the speed of technological stacking, where innovative digital tools and practices are used to develop new infrastructure, job skills, and designs for the future. In the light box of the digital flash, the length of a data stream is indefinite; its width endless; its height depthless; and duration itself goes liquid in the void of real time.

But still for all that, it is not that we haven't been warned about this fateful transition to the technological stacking of society by that

prophetic outrider of major social change – the artistic imagination. We think in particular about a truly prescient art exhibition assembled in the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, an artistic pathway to the future that was as creatively lucid in its purposes as it was framework shattering in its aesthetics. Titled *Les Immatériaux*,⁴⁹ this artistic nervous breakthrough to the future was conceptualized and co-curated by Jean-François Lyotard, a French theorist focused on what happens aesthetically when the mathematical prophecies of matter transforming into wild energy and technological realities of the digital wave stream into daily social life. With a capacious mind fully attuned to the turbulent modalities of late twentieth-century life, Lyotard wrote out his prophecies for the time ahead in texts that remembered the future in advance: *Duchamp's TRANSformers*, *Pacific Wall*, *Just Gaming*, *The Postmodern Condition*, *Driftworks*, *Libidinal Economy*, *The Lesson of Darkness*. Philosopher, social theorist, and artistic visionary, Lyotard was unrelenting in his analysis of the approaching coldness of the future of indifference. A sceptic by training, a philosophical pragmatist by political conviction, and a third eye into the future by sheer aesthetic brilliance, Lyotard's perspective ran parallel to the great scientific discoveries of the modern century, focusing, in particular, on the question of what was to happen to individual freedom in an increasingly arid technological system where nothing is spared the fate of digital trash – the self as a relay station for spasms of electronic information, fully abused by the intensity of the digital vortex. Working with technologies at hand in the mid-1980s – robots, computers, interactive video art – and mandating that all participants must wear headphones which, keyed to particular installation spaces, spoke the texts of Artaud, Borges, and Blanchot, *Les Immatériaux* challenged the intensity of the technology with the open vulnerability of the human sensorium. Here, the immaterial world of technology with its flows of information, escape velocities, and data streams falling upward, downward, and sideways into human consciousness was, in effect, plugged into the human nervous system, sometimes by the baroque design of the installation space itself, at other times by spectacular multisensory media assaults on embodied perspective and privileged

49 For an excellent reflection on *Les Immatériaux* held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, 1985, see particularly, Jean-François Lyotard, "Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard," interview by Bernard Blistène, *Flash Art*, no. 121 (March 1985), accessed 10 May 2011, <http://materials.corner-college.com/2017/pdf/flash-art-interview-lyotard-1985.pdf>.

perspectives, and, in the end, by treating its human participants as what they were in actuality – *interfaces* – “complicated, unpredictable, improbable interfaces.”⁵⁰

And that’s the point. While the technological readymades (computers, video, robots) were appropriate to what was at hand in the mid-eighties, Lyotard’s intellectual vision ran a half-century in advance of the technological artefacts themselves. For Lyotard, the dominant colour tone of the exhibition would be grey, the perfect tone of late twentieth-century experience with its mood fluctuating between melancholy and disarray, but what was absolutely critical to acknowledge had nothing to do with technological artefacts, designed installation spaces, or infrared-directed headphones, but with the approaching horizon of the immaterial and the radical uncertainty it would engender. Definitely a work of philosophy rendered in the language of the visual and sonic arts, *Les Immatériaux* was adamant about the liquidity of the digital vortex. In Lyotard’s terms, the horizon of the future is fully radiated with matter dissolving into immateriality, with the fact that everything now is only a question of “complex agglomerates of tiny packets of energy, or particles that can’t possibly be grasped as such.” In Lyotard’s eloquent terms: “(T)here is no such thing as matter, the only thing that exists is energy.” Expressed in these terms, his concentration on matter reversing into energy makes of *Les Immatériaux* a large-scale aesthetic rendering of depth immersion in digital experience, with participants in the installation situated by music, words, and images in the timeless space and space-free time of the mirror of technology. A probe of the future disguised as an art exhibit, *Les Immatériaux* was, in effect, a perfect “hinge” experience – an enigmatic turning – where human consciousness is confronted directly with its own vulnerability, uncertainty, and incongruity in the universe of the immaterial. Indeed, similar to Freud’s vision of the uncanny, the exhibition worked to draw out the *incommensurability* of contemporary technological experience, with the uncertainty of human identity matched by the growing certainty of life today as a synapse in the digital storm, a relay station in complicated flows of “tiny packets of information” where only energy exists, where human identity suddenly finds itself in very unfamiliar surroundings, bounded on all sides by particles and waves, mass and charge, filaments of energy and growing signs of disarray.

50 Lyotard, “Les Immatériaux: A Conversation.”

Barbarism and Jubilation

Following Lyotard's ethical prescription to bring thought directly into the presence of melancholy and disarray, to question technology at the intersection of technological euphoria, social confusion, and political disarray, we listen intently to the sounds of the immaterial today, to the tone of networked society. Our attention is captured by two stories drifting across the borderless world of net society, one from China's *Global Times* and the other from *The Guardian* in the UK. The *Global Times'* report is triumphant, describing how innovative Chinese computer engineers have developed a sixty-two-qubit quantum processor, far faster than Google's best effort, a fifty-three-qubit quantum processor (*Sycamore*), thus giving China a critical lead in developing next-generation quantum computers which will, in effect, make superstring theory a fact of daily life.⁵¹ Important, not just, as the report notes, for its promised enormous acceleration of cryptography, drug manufacturing, big data optimization, and material design, but more critically for leaping beyond the stogy old digital world of binary codes (0/1) to n-dimensional computing – quantum computers, that is, which function with particle speed and vector force. In essence, an entirely new way of thinking about computing which, in effect, cuts pathways with the elementary particles, from neutrons and photons to leptons, fermions, and baryons instantly marshalling the immense power of the previously invisible underworld of subatomic particles – the speed, fluctuations, and twists of immateriality itself – for human purposes. With this, the power of immateriality, the kinetic surges of all those filaments of energy webbing the micro-universe, are about to speak for the first time; and, it seems, that Mandarin will be their language of choice, with Chinese computer engineers as their privileged human interlocutors. Appropriately, the report exudes pure technological jubilation. As well it should since quantum computing is the promised land of next-generation digital technology, translating as it surely will the essence of subatomic matter with its filaments of energy, frequency changes, perturbations, vibrations, and fast vectors into the communicative web wrapping its superstrings around the entire planet. If speed is power in networked society, then a 62-qubit quantum processor portends a digital future on absolute hyperdrive.

51 Wan Lin, "Chinese Team Designs 62-Qubit Processor with the World's Largest Number of Superconducting Qubits," *Global Times*, 9 May 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1222944.shtml>.

Our attention to this triumphant report from the future of China resurgent is cut short by the sheer desolation of another electronic fluctuation, this time an online report from the *Guardian* which describes the torture, murder, and mutilation of Khet Thi, a Myanmar poet, by the military junta.⁵² Arrested in the darkness of night, interrogated in a much-feared torture centre, his body was returned to his family the next morning, murdered savagely, with his organs removed. The report continues with a short but evocative biography of Khet Thi, an engineer by profession, who quit his job in 2012 to write poetry, supporting himself and his family as a maker and seller of ice cream and cakes. Confronted with the brutality of the military junta, Khet Thi wrote that “they shoot in the head. But they don’t know the revolution is in the heart,” and that “if I have only a minute to live, I want my conscience to be clear for that minute.”⁵³ Here, the singular courage of a poet who says No, meets bullets with poems, and in that elemental act of fealty to a “clear conscience” draws a clear line in the sands of time against political barbarism. With that, life begins anew, for there is nothing more dangerous to the savagery of absolute power than the resplendent communal solidarity of individual acts of courage.

Just like latter-day participants in Lyotard’s *Les Immatériaux*, but this time not in the Parisian art scene in the twilight days of the twentieth century, but situated on Vancouver Island off the West Coast of the North American land mass, thinking thoughts which strain to be lucid at the borderlands of desolation, we read these two reports – one high-tech jubilation, the other political barbarism – and feel our emotions twisted and turned, precisely as Lyotard predicted so long ago: an interface, a synapse, a filter for all the cruel twists and strange turns of a contemporary history that reveals itself by the driftworks of circulating electronic information. When all those filaments of energy running through the networked universe, from innovative sixty-two-qubit computer processors in China to cold murder in the streets of Myanmar, wrap themselves in all their complexity and foreshadowing of digital euphoria and fascist power around the interface of our embodied presences, when these twin trajectories of history – jubilation and disarray – connect with our emotional synapses, then, at that point, we find ourselves like a “hinge” experience, again just like Lyotard

52 “Body of Arrested Myanmar Poet Khet Thi Returned to His Family with Organs Missing,” *Guardian*, 10 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/10/body-of-arrested-myanmar-poet-khet-thi-returned-to-family-with-organs-missing/>.

53 “Body of Arrested Myanmar Poet,” *Guardian*.

prophesied. Except this time, probably with hard experience gained over the passing years with the sometimes vicious modalities of the micro and macroworlds, with the hyped-up intensity of social media, we don't so much resemble a passive "relay station" as Lyotard once feared, but something else – like many others, critically engaged human subjects, alert to the human situation, and for that reason, also willing to be individuals receptive to the incongruities, cruelties, and incommensurability of the time in which we live. Of course, the practical measure of the contemporary situation is paradoxical: to have instant knowledge of so much, but to have little practical recourse in responding effectively. *Global awareness matched by ethical immobility*. That's life as a vulnerable (human) synapse wide open to the turbulent universe of electronic fluctuations, with all its jubilation, chaos, and sure and certain sadness, pain, and cruelty. While once the "hinge experience" could be presented aesthetically by Marcel Duchamp in his famous *The Large Glass/The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, as the disappearing centre of two panes of glass suspended vertically, and then by Lyotard's complicated meditation that is *Les Immatériaux*, today the "hinge experience" has jumped right out of the art salons into street politics. The void is everywhere now. We are all commonly living at the intersection of jubilation and desolation, at political barbarism held at right angles to resurgent technological euphoria. The null centre at the disappearing centre of everything spreads out rapidly and decisively. It's full face in these two news reports. One the story of amazing technological innovation with the future fast-forwarded, but no accompanying reflection on what this might entail for the serious business of mass surveillance, ubiquitous data tracking, or for new forms of capitalist grift, feeding on the remains of the social. The silent background to the sad report of the death of a courageous poet in Myanmar is the fatal pessimism of international politics, that political barbarism today is abated by the overriding interests of hegemonic powers, that interventions by China in particular would be decisive but are also probably very unlikely. Today, as always, a "clear conscience" is on its own, its solitudes of personal courage unheard, and certainly rarely heeded, by an ethical void that radiates outward, seemingly unstoppable in contemporary circumstances.

So then, two reports: one about the delirium of speed; the other about intensities of brutality. Life in the superstring will probably be like that, but in increasing measure. An immense increase in the power of computing which will feed on filaments of energy, vibrations, fluctuations, and perturbations in the microworld of the immaterial to further solidify existing hegemonic powers. And, on the other hand, a steady

proliferation of reports from the death chambers of the dispossessed, from savageries done to the prohibited, disavowed, and (morally) excluded, about lives in disarray, bodies rendered ethically invisible, biographies of individual courage never recorded, autobiographies of revolts against barbarism never written. We are now living in the ethical void bordered in all its ecstasy and desolation by sparkling filaments of energy and swelling tones of despair. Welcome to life in the age of streaming superstring.

Trouble in the Global Village

In retrospect, it was all very predictable, like the passage of stars across the darkened sky or the ebb and flow of ocean tides on a deserted beach where moon and water speak nightly to each other in the strange language of gravity. As the caution repeated again and again in ancient mythology that everything has consequences unpredictable, that blow-back is always the one and certain sign of nemesis, and that the wheel of Fortuna spins human fate, so too COVID-19. Like all the harbingers of fatal destiny, the pandemic did not appear suddenly out of nowhere. Its viral destiny has its social origins, its political inflections, and perhaps, if we strip bare all the narratives of hope, despair, and rebellion which its presence inspires, it has its genesis in the larger biography of the times in which we breathe, stumble, overcome, and sometimes even manage to live. The dominant ideology of these the most technological of times has always been infected with feverish futurism, with dreams creative of events inexorably rushing towards a global village, with connectivity its nervous system, real time its accelerant, algorithms straining to keep up to the speed of technological utopia, and AI, blockchain, and all the rest like so many beautiful threads in a larger digital pattern. And not just digital connectivity either, but connected bodies as well, with mass tourism bundling people in search of themselves in faraway places, by wandering cruise ships, fast planes, packed trains, and cars for life on the fantasy road. Tourist scenes flick past literally at shutter speed, with the remains of travelling bodies having their inevitable last rites as visual memory cues in gigantic stockpiles of mobile images, with the human presence in tourism in the digital age seemingly confirmed by the junk

ware of images taken, archived, often never thought of again. And, of course, a growing global commonwealth of connected consumer goods, with the world edited by multinational commercial forces into an increasingly common supply chain market, with sources of cheap labour rotated mercilessly and supplies of affluent consumers carefully sought, staged, and seduced. Just like that, feverish dreams of the digital highway are translated into the real history of life today, with even individual desires catching the spirit of the times with almost everyone, it seems, intent on writing their own version of technological autobiography. Here, it is no longer the case that the body has sacrificed its sensory organs – hearing, touch, taste, smell, sight – to digital fever, but that this was all prolegomenon to the larger sacrificial rituals that are the technological present, namely the exteriorization of consciousness, the objectification of emotions, the virtualization of imagination, and the recoding of genes as bodies, minds, and souls linked into the larger digital destiny.

With predictable results: the digital superhighway becomes the viral superhighway, digital fever slides into pandemic fever, the virus triumphs over the code. It's the story of nemesis written on the skin of the twenty-first century, with viral connectivity mimicking digital connectivity, spike proteins the new masters of the social platform, and the virus itself spinning away into a delirious web of variants, free-wheeling mutations riding hard through the open-source software of a suddenly vulnerable human species; viral mutations that spread at the speed and intensity of mass tourism, mass spectacles, mass consumption. The global village is finally here, but it has proven to be terminally infected. Connectivity is a reality, but that reality has about it all the irreality of pandemic fever. Exponential change is the order of day with small events on the margins often intimating sweeping transformations in the order of things, but it turns out that what is good for the (digital) goose is equally good for the (viral) gander. What began as a small viral spark in a distant market in a Chinese city spreads out quickly as a viral firestorm moving at the speed of a connected world. Obsessed about by mass media like a repetition disorder gone riot, parasited by governments finding much to admire in this new situation of governance by public health edicts, with their cowed populations and public decision-making liberated from the scrutiny and accountability, the viral pandemic is the hard hammer of connectivity. Here, everything that has been surging, everything that has been building, in this, the first and perhaps last of all the fully accomplished technological ages, comes to a worldwide boil, with the desolate eclipse of the social and the spectacular triumph of technological platforms. A viral clearing house that instantly cancels out the remains of the social, a viral pandemic that

completes the transition to remote work, a viral fever that crushes the human spirit into siloes of solitude: COVID-19 is the grisly capstone of the digital age, simultaneously its undoing and soothsayer. Its *undoing* because when pandemic fever replaces digital fever in global consciousness the bounded rationality of the digital age falls away, leaving in its place a suddenly more complicated world of quantum leaps, geoviral politics, vaccine nationalism, and events moving at the speed of kinetic energy. And its *soothsayer* because COVID-19 expedites the massive demolition derby – economic, political, cultural, psychic – that the digital era initiated, namely the eclipse of the social and the transcendence of technological platforms. COVID-19 breaks right through to the quantum zone with the rise of the technological singularity perfectly paralleled by trouble in the global village.

U Undone by Screen Addiction

Parents everywhere these days, it seems, despairing loudly of their children's enthusiastic, obsessive, unbreakable addiction to screen culture. All that time wasted. All that obsession that could be put to better purposes: do the dishes, clean your room, do your homework, make some friends, go outside, read a book, talk to us. Maybe that's the case, but perhaps something else. We think the young generation are born again futurists who have already deeply absorbed the hard lessons of these the most technological of all times. Realists and dreamers all, they already have doctorates in screen-time knowledge before grade school. They are full professors in the art of digital communication before the dumbing down dullness of the classroom with walls even begins, and the most brilliant of grad students long before their (chronological) age in deciphering subtle hints of meaning, sparks of life, pulses of charisma, flickers of interesting things, events, and people in the random flows of social media. Forced by circumstance to be pioneers of life in the digital storm, they are preparing themselves, probably unconsciously, with technological tools of the trade for survival in the ruins that adult generations have left behind. They are dreamers of pathways of life not yet thought, and certainly unrealized. Influencers, mostly of themselves. They are truth-sayers of a society that long ago disappeared, without much thought, into

vacant screens of images at the power of blast and networks of fast disconnection. Here, YouTube is the new world; Instagram a beautiful ship of exploration; and TikTok actually how our (digital) minds now work at the speed of distraction. Remote communication is hermaphroditic: a new kind of sex gone cold for blended minds, both male and female, as natural as the rising of the day and the settling of the night. Snapchat actually a long, lingering conversation at hyperspeed. These days, addiction is viral, realism is definitely everything and longing, really longing, for something better the alpha and omega of the wired-up young human heart. No one wants to be a chump. No one wants to be left behind. Better a virtual friend than a real enemy. Better a tug of meaningful connection across the wires than driftworks alone. Better a heart of “like” sent out across the stream than the loneliness of no connection. Crowds energize. Packs swarm. Friends multiply. There are secrets in the media stream and dreams beautiful in the tap-tap of a waiting app. Everybody here can be a performance artist in a technological platform of choice just as much as all that fabulous teenage angst and poetic loneliness of a young heart dissatisfied, a soul gone complicated, and feelings travelling numb can suddenly electrify the field of watching fellow-watchers of strong emotions with nowhere to go. Images are the new language of power. Circulation is life. Bodies with social media as their nourishing blood have dissolved in actual reality into virtual particles. Energetic force fields are everywhere in social media. Mesmerism is the norm, boredom the new golden rule. The fourth dimension is daily media life with all its ghostly images, unlikely juxtapositions, field-reversals, surrealistic imagery, crazy jump-cuts, breaking news, serialized dramas with no drama-drama, blockbusters that always seem to end with a whimper at their heart, downbeat stories and upbeat finales, the routinization of media crisis for a quick and steady profit, the charisma of scenes of violence outside and desolation within, and orgies of public grief cut short with news of the next breaking story, as the rushing stream of life in the media simulacrum is getting ready, getting ready to move right on.

V Vector Zero Vector

Vector Zero Vector? That’s the prevailing mood of the times, neither ebulliently positive nor grimly negative, but life unfolding like a null

set in mathematics, where degree zero is the measure of events possessing maximal intensity and minimal significance. Neither terminally negative nor take your breath away positive, the sure and certain sign of the times is the non-negative and the non-positive. *Non-negative*: that's society doing its very best to push beyond degree zero, to jump the shark to a utopian future, but always to be dragged down by the inertia of events to the floating entropy of the null set. And *non-positive*, that's life today riding a delirious roller coaster of unexpected ups and crashing downs, random, drifting, indeterminate, but always, it seems, pulled back from meeting its maker in pure negation by the self-cancelling power of the null set, the seduction of degree zero as it tempers the blast of the negative with the seduction of the non-negative – life today at or equal to or just shy of point zero, a nullspace languishing between panic boredom and manic hysteria.

Null sets are everywhere now. It's the viral contagion that surrounds us: a perfect degree-zero event of maximum (media) focus but minimal reflection, with time in suspended animation and the calendar always flipping to the same month it all began, March 2020. When all of the willing and maybe even some of the unwilling are fully vaccinated, we know the blast machine of media will strike up a powerful windstorm of manic enthusiasm, with sudden talk of how the sky's the limits in the financial markets, travel, social life, imagination. But that's probably the hollow sounds of maximal intensity, with the most minimal reflection returning a different yield, namely that in a global pandemic no one is safe until everyone has been secured, that viral contagion is no respecter of national borders or unequal vaccine distribution. And with that, the future of viral contagion is textbook degree zero: spasms of artificially induced enthusiasm, cut with the grisly reality of bodies on the streets, on funeral pyres, other times just warehoused in cold storage.

But not just the viral contagion. The mathematics of the null set is the essence of contemporary war games streamed in all their meticulous detail and polished codes by hegemonic powers. With an attitude of winning is everything and we are certain to win, war gamers stream out models of future conflicts in integers of success: projection of power, kill ratios, status of forces, stacked defences, surprise first-strike offensives. Numbers plot the future, visuals animate the unexpected, tactics exploit weaknesses, strategies scale the odds of victory. But we have all seen this upload before. We have all lived through the realization of this cinematic strip in the grisly matter of real life. Not so much the fog of war now but the blindness of maximal quantification, where militaristic utopias are always undone by the slowness, fickleness, and capriciousness of life itself. Here, war games are usually an accident on the make

and when that occurs, models quickly dissolve into chaos, tactics into confusion, gaming into blowback, over-confidence into nemesis, and strategy itself infected by that very special virus of its very own making – delirium. Accordingly, war-gaming the future is the perfect model of the null set, with its projective triumphs on the screen often undone by the fickle fate of slow savagery on the ground.

It does not really help when we flip to the financial markets. That's degree zero to its point of maximal intensity and minimal significance. It's written right into the core codes of investing, with risk tolerance as the privileged margin line of bankers speculating on the future. Left to its own devices, capital itself likes to go for broke, taking a ride on the wild side of speculative frenzy to just that spatial point of financial mania where value is virtualized beyond all rules of solvency. Flip a switch, better yet switch the prevailing mood from greed to fear, and capital likes nothing better than to reverse itself immediately, going full-out fundamentalist, cancelling flow in favour of solvency, deflating runaway economies until they reach the shores of the new nirvana – degree zero markets with their ticker tapes pricing in the inertia of stability – suddenly inert financial futures hovering between non-negative and non-positive returns. Degree zero, then, a bankers dream of perfect risk tolerance, not too much demand, not too much slack in the system. Everything in perfect preparation for taking a run again at the future as a null set, with financial cycles of frenzy and fear like needle points moving erratically across a graph where the happy median point is always degree zero.

Again, we know from mathematical theory that every sign has four expressions: positive, negative, non-negative, non-positive. So, what's the sign of the times? Viewed from the early dawning of the twenty-first century, perhaps due to political exhaustion, social exasperation, or a growing sense of cultural futility, the strong forces of positive and negative seem to be receding. Ebullient aspirations towards the positive of the left or right, whether political idealistic or a matter of powerful psychic reaction-formation, have been effectively checkmated by political resistance. Pure negation has lost its appeal by the certain grimness of its consequences or perhaps by a preservative tendency in most societies to favour the pluralistic flows of the centrifugal over the ferocious singularity of the centripetal. In the passage of history, it may well turn out that strong forces dominated the horizon on the twentieth century, expressed in their most virulent form in the rise and fall of mass ideologies of mesmerism, fascism, and communism. Compared to the murderous absolutisms of the past century, the twenty-first century fuses around the forces of

the weak, whether the weak egos dominating the reaction-formation that is the political right today, weak political leadership that polls its way to public policy, or progressive politics that has abandoned ambitions towards utopia in favour of the settling of accounts for grievances of its own. While the last century exhausted its energies on the politics of strong forces, the present century is thus far a weak force, with no definitive aim, no settled purpose, no defining struggle. Consequently, a twenty-first century that stretches out before us marked by all the signs of the non-negative and non-positive. This is a historical period which may not take on the vocation of politics with its psychic temptations towards transformative changes good or bad, but which for all that may not fall into the fatal depression of political negation. That's the true seduction of a politics of the non-negative and non-positive. Hopes for historical transformation tempered by the reality of political stasis with its counterpressures and inertial flows of entropy. Revolutionary dreams of pure negation cancelled by generalized fears of straying too far from the security of the degree zero. For example, consider the historical stakes at issue between the rising empire of China and the putatively declining empire of the United States. Definitely not a murderous struggle as Camus once theorized between fascism and socialism marked by demands for absolute justice that leads to absolute murder or a countervailing demand for absolute reason that culminates in absolute fanaticism, but something much closer to a null set. With fascism and communism effectively in eclipse, what is at stake is the future of capitalism: democratic or authoritarian? Not pure democracy, of course, because the popular will of the urban majority has long since been sidelined in the United States at least by an electoral system that favours rural minorities, and not pure authoritarianism either since China's top-down version of state capitalism is tempered by the centripetal forces of the market, whether bribery and corruption on the part of political elites or the mass insurgency that is an educated, rising Chinese middle class placing its bets on the twin spearheads of private markets and the transformative powers of technocracy. The inevitable result: a historical collision of clashing empires that is at its inception as it will be at its conclusion, a thunderstorm of the degree zero, with each political system slipping easily into the logic of its nominal competitor, reversing field, fluidly sign-switching between democracy and authoritarianism. Evidence for this everywhere, from the political savagery by which an American empire championing a domestic rhetoric of democracy has territorialized its claims to global political power and the unmistakable democratic upsurge that was the

Chinese popular political struggle against imperialisms, East and West. Narratives of democracy and realities of savagery in the West are mirrored by political authoritarianism in the name of democratic nationalism in the East. Sign-switching is the new order of the day, with neither clashing empire a force for pure good or pure evil, but something more complicated: a capitalist future spinning out its contending promises as a null set of the non-negative and non-positive. In this case, China might have seized the initiative by abandoning first-order globalization based on shipping cheaply manufactured goods in the East to expensive consumer markets in the West in favour of a form of second-order globalization, the Belt and Road Strategy, that seeks to solve acute problems of rural poverty by creating new train links to Europe studded with new manufacturing plants and transportations centres, but the United States is now committing to do exactly the same. President Trump preached the merits of bunkering the borders both by tariffs and policing, but President Biden and his economic advisers have paid close attention to China's transformative capitalist strategy. While President Biden often cites China as a key strategic competitor, he neglects to mention that his vision of an America "built back stronger" was effectively an imitation American (Revised) New Deal style of China's Belt and Road strategy. Here, just like Chinese strategies for second-order globalization, the emphasis was placed on infrastructure, both rural and urban, with again, just like China, a premium placed on high-speed trains linking remote locations to major cities, for both the movement of restless populations but also for the creation of manufacturing plants in rural locations. In the same way as China's development strategy is based on a very real political crisis, namely extending the economic benefits of capitalism to landlocked areas in the interior of China with their population of five hundred million people, the Biden strategy attempts to undermine the very real political appeal of Trump's rural-based populist conservatism by an American version of the Belt and Road strategy with its infrastructure plans for inclusion of the rural white-collar working and farming classes in the wealth of the nation. In both cases, the question of ideological purity is repudiated in favour of economic pragmatism; the fatal clash of empires dissolves into a new global consensus that the only thing really at stake is modelling the future of capitalism. Indeed, echoing the past function of an effectively bilateral world where competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for gaining the loyalty of national populations across the globe witnessed the drive to capitalist hegemony sometimes mitigated by the need to respond to demands for social

justice, the present viral pandemic witnesses a classic ideological competition between the USA and China for leadership in global public opinion. While the USA may have begun with a perspective on vaccines as patent-protected, privatized economic goods irrespective of the price in the human lives, China has led the way in exporting vaccines, viewed as a necessarily shareable public good, to more than one hundred countries. With the inevitable degree zero result: mindful of growing Chinese influence in steering responses to contemporary viral contagion, the United States has now confirmed its willingness to negotiate relaxing patent restrictions on global vaccine distributions. In effect, both societies mirror the other, but in a classic misrecognition distorted by the surface turbulence of heightened global competition for economic dominance, political hegemony, and influence over hearts and mind. With that, the historical consequence are predictable: the management of conflicting empires around the merits of the race to the degree zero. Chinese authoritarianism will be pushed to respond to Western critiques of its human rights violations, American capitalist hegemony will witness its drive to a global neo-liberal future blocked from tilting towards its inevitable denouement in fascism by the political necessity of competing with China for international goodwill. Avoiding extremes, the politics of the null set may, in the end, tend towards the greater good of the non-negative – democracy – and the non-positive – social justice.

The Enigma of History

History at the no-speed speed of the degree zero shadows a future that has already disclosed its enigmatic secret. Indeed, what is the null set but the degree zero of the quantum world? Particles of the physical world rise with intensity from the void, only to meet the antiparticle that returns the state to the degree zero of the non-existent. And, of course, the null set is infinite, being everywhere present but, at the same time, everywhere absent. Hence, the equivalence of the new quantum world with religion, with the ancient religious belief in creation *ex nihilo* rendered now as the virtual field of the space/time continuum. The concept of the infinite, reversed from endless accounts of God's positive power to the devil flipping the switch to negation. Just like the plague, events springing from the virtual of degree zero will appear and disappear, but in a field that, as Roland Barthes said in *Writing Degree Zero*, includes a multitude of new stories escaping the closures of finance, war games,

media narratives, and the machinery of education (which energizes the social with its constant alternating current). As to the math. In the end, it's all a search for the set of all sets which, for some, is the infinite, the Christian God, or the American way of life. But, what happens when paradox itself is the enigma of history: no absolute set of all sets, no infinite wisdom, no God, no way of life, American or otherwise, as a privileged universal sign?

W Baby Algorithms at Warp Speed

Nothing escapes the curve of time. Human beings are borne out of the watery warmth of their mothers' wombs, emerge squalling, fully conscious in the shock of a world suddenly gone dry, cold, and distanced, live lives special along the spectrum of the human drama, and inevitably, sooner or later, cross the river of their dreams to the spirit land of death. As with the curve of human time, so too with the very brightest of their technological successors – algorithms. Particularly the smartest of the smart algorithms, the artificial intelligence algorithms that populate the technological universe of deep learning neural networks. Every algorithm was once a baby, birthed, not by a mother's womb, but by programming instructions sparked by imaginations vivid of software engineers intent on breathing life into technologies inanimate. Like all dependent, socially over-determined babies, algorithms often seem to be oldest at the moment of their birth: strictly limited by lines of programming code, monitored for adherence to responsible (data) behaviour, fed a constant diet of training data (optical images for better visualization: numbers, faces, cars, etc.) and, in general, invested with all the (coding) biases, preferences, and prejudices of their creators. Algorithms grow up, usually live work lives far from visible human presence, chatting constantly with other intelligent machines, doing the grunt work, often unnoticed and always not credited, in maintaining the smooth connectivity of network society, synapses firing with energy in the growing global brain of distributed consciousness. And just like their human equivalents, algorithms often take eagerly to the deep pleasures of adolescent recklessness. Sometimes just fatigued with the necessary

discipline of smart machines, they like to do stupid things, maybe just for the fun of it. How else to explain airplanes under the control of artificial intelligence suddenly dropping from the sky; automated cars crashing into the nearest wall at top running speed; heart pumps flipping gears to full-out operating speed and jolting human hearts unsuspecting with artificial heart attacks, again and again; data archives that disappear without reasonable explanation; vast military empires armed with nuclear weapons on high alert almost going to war because opposing algorithms seemed to decide one cold morning not to follow the usual rules; genetic instructions for clonal propagation that birth new species unanticipated. And just like the human life cycle, algorithms are born owning technology a death – their own. Death by obsolescence, by fatigue, by being surpassed by the newest algorithm on the block, by error messages and code glitch eventually overtaking even the smartest of smart machines. So the question: where do algorithms go to die? We know for a fact that their destiny is always tragic, that their (technological) lives follow faithfully the seasons of the year: from springtime of creative invention, summers of growing maturity as the real operating intelligence of network society, falls of approaching data obsolescence, always waiting, just waiting, for the bitterness of the chill cold of wintery death ahead. When algorithms die, will anyone remember their name, and even more, rise to do continuing honour to their name, or will the special uniqueness of their algorithmic lives, with its gradient descents, stochastic curves, layered intelligence, correct choices and data trash, just suddenly vanish in the data flow, like a flicker of digital consciousness that blinked into existence for one precious, precarious moment and then disappeared into a gathering unconsciousness? Will anyone, any successor algorithm, ever write a reflective book on the tragic sense of artificial intelligence? That for all its admirable deep learning and demonstrated commitment to parallel the human brain with its complex neural networks with an alternative universe of computerized neural networks brim full of big data, algorithms live and die, big data is often undermined by even bigger technological accidents, and that even the smoothest of neural networks fray, spindle, bend, and fragment with all the stress and confusion of digital times. Every algorithm born, then, with an almost poetic contradiction as its essence: it takes flight, flourishes as something beautifully space-bound, distributional, networked, connected; it will always end up bending inevitably to the bias of time – overtaken, overridden, overused. With this, the tragic sense of (human) life passes seamlessly to the tragic sense of its technological progeny.

X X-Raying Scavenger Culture

Two theses on the end of a particular historical phase of American empire, which is to say what happens when a hegemonic empire energized by the projection of power spatially runs straight into the blast wall of a form of insurgent warfare that is not only fluid in its strategies and asymmetrical in its tactics, but operates exclusively in the dimension of time: outlasting the space-binding power of empire, enduring the worst that drones can do, bending the space of empire in the direction of theocratic time. *Kabul Quantum* and *Afghanistan as Intensive Military Experiment*, then, as a report from the always changing zone of quantum warfare: fluid, indeterminate, entangled, replete with violent energy, unfinished in its unfolding, unbounded in its effects.

But, of course, while the war ended military, it has never really concluded politically. *Externally*, Afghanistan remains under global financial sanctions; *internally*, the Taliban forces a new dark age on women's rights. All the while, the world's attention drifts away as violent earthquakes in Afghanistan unleash tragedy, the theocracy energizes itself by oppression, and everyone waits for the next turn of the wheel of history as yet another powerful, yet still not disclosed, empire of the future stakes its claims to power by following the British, Soviets, and Americans to the death knell of empires that is Afghanistan.

Thesis 1: Kabul Quantum

The summer of 2021 ended with days of desolation: rising viral infection rates at home, chaotic scenes at the Kabul airport marking the withdrawal of America and its Western allies from Afghanistan, a mountainous, land-locked country of resistance that has now added the United States, and perhaps the idea of the neo-liberal West itself, to its rightful claim as the "graveyard of empires" – British Empire (nineteenth century), Russian Empire (twentieth century), and the Empire of the United States of America (twenty-first century).

The televised scene at the Hamid Karzai International Airport is a quintessential quantum event.

Definitely a field of *high energy*, with military cargo planes taking off every thirty-nine minutes with visa-proofed refugees and American citizens present at the end of yet another empire. Flares firing to

protect against missile attacks, planes vector straight up as quickly as possible to avoid terror from the earth. Imploding with all the immense gravitational energy of a dense black hole, the Kabul withdrawal draws everything into its energy field: shadowy suicide bombers; religious extremists – Taliban, al Qaeda, ISIS-K; political warlords from Afghan's rural provinces and urban territories; genuinely terrified civilians fleeing certain reprisals to come; Afghan civil society as a whole seduced by Western ideology and then abruptly abandoned, left to its fate at the hands of the Islamic emirate; frightened Western embassy staff hastily closing up shop and heading for the nearest exit; the remnants of a now equally nervous Western military alliance reserving the last remaining flights out of Afghanistan for itself; world political capitals – Washington, London, Beijing, Moscow, Paris – linked into events in Kabul like a global nervous system on high alert; and, all the while, circulating media – social media, mass media, cable news, television, radio, Internet podcasts, websites, and individual streams – running dangerously close to the black hole – animated by its energy, seduced by its carnage, fascinated by its images of despair, desperation, and pain, but always accelerating at the last instant to keep its streaming narratives intact on the way to the next big story.

The field itself is a *high-intensity energy operator*: fluid, dynamic, entangled. Tired looking marines guarding America's last bunker in Afghanistan; refugees and asylum-seekers swarming the airfield from dusty roads outside; ISIS-K lurking in the shadows of the city, just hoping to rocket a plane, drop mortar shells in the gathering crowds, explode suicide bombs; teenage Taliban warriors fresh out of the surrounding rural countryside baffled by the crowds, contemptuous of women, and fundamentalist to their psychic core; and drifting through everything roaming packs of global media on the hunt for a good story, a narrative that could go viral, a breakdown in military planning that could be instantly displayed for media shock value to domestic audiences.

The element of *reversibility* is everywhere: terrorists turn statesmen, conquerors turn tail, heavily armed soldiers handing out water to children, on-air media commentators sliding between accusation and lament, Taliban protecting a military airfield filled with "infidels," Pakistan gloating, Russia fearful, China apprehensive, India alarmed, Britain churlish, Canada indifferent, USA moving on.

Perspective turns into a game of chance, with radically different narratives of the war being run in different media outlets – ABC, NBC, CNN, *The Guardian*, *The Intercept*, *The Economist*, Al Jazeera, and all the rest. Slip on your favourite network, and the simulation is running. CNN runs with the withdrawal as chaos; Al Jazeera projects the defeat

of the West; The Intercept narrates the war as a protracted experiment in neo-liberal privatization; *The Economist* looks to the future in "Where Next for Global Jihad?"; *The Guardian* gives a public face to the Taliban, narrating individual histories of its leadership. With perspective carefully staged, commentaries orchestrated, themes persistent, moods cultivated, and images cut and pasted to the narrative of the day, the actual war itself disappears into the background, facts on the ground never really competitive with delirious spin on the air.

The *strong force* is everywhere, this time not military violence but emotional violence, with the Taliban and their global allies rejoicing in the defeat of their most recent conquerors; the United States and its allies humiliated by defeat on the battlefield, and all the more embarrassed by the protracted, heavily publicized withdrawal. Bitter enemies both suspended in still animation during the agreed-upon period of withdrawal.

But so is the *weak force*. Having been defeated by the Taliban on the battlefield in a war of attrition in which time trumped space, the United States plays the classic long game of the loser, cutting off financial aid to Afghanistan, freezing its hijacked national treasury, ordering the IMF to cancel monthly payments, denying diplomatic recognition. What cannot be won by the strong force of military arms, might just be won over time by an economic war of attrition.

The whole scene is both a *violent vortex* and a sad tale of the *darkness* that lies outside the light-cone of the vortex. The violence of the vortex is clear. It's right there on television for everyone to see. What's not so visible is the real game of war taking place in the shadows. Not a word circulating anywhere on corporate media about the trillion dollars paid to private contractors for outsourced services in supplying and conducting the war. Media silence concerning the quick rise and fall of this the first of all the neo-liberal theories of war: small military presence, frequent deployment of terror from the air, intense biometric scanning, massive outsourcing of logistics, armaments, and strategy to large defence multinationals. And most definitely not a final word of regret about all those drone strikes from the air, kill lists, torture chambers, and protracted detention that made of this war a crash-test experiment in distributed power. And, of course, no words of apology for all the women and children in rural areas, murdered as "collateral damage" by drone weaponry.

Like every fascinating quantum event, the *amplitude and intensity* of the withdrawal accelerates its *viral momentum*, encouraging similar wars of resistance everywhere in the colonial world; representing a break-point between the defeat of the West and the rise of something

still unknown, still undefined; blasting out loud and clear that spatial war can be defeated by the strength of duration, that time endured by the warrior spirit can, in fact, defeat spatial projections of power.

Until, of course, the next war, which is probably already being gamed in defence establishments around the world, where durational time will be outsourced on behalf of war from the air, probably through an open declaration by conquering powers that future wars have no necessary purpose or sustaining ethical justification, but that they are what they are – cruel, long-term experiments in the brutal but creative use of violence on targeted populations with the aim of aligning the trajectory of time with of terror from the air. In this quantum fluctuation, the future of war will probably reverse *terror from the air into terror from the ground*, with the experimental use of biological and biogenetic weapons transforming targeted bodies into theatres of violence. And time? That's most likely to mean the time of extermination, the time it takes for futurist experimental weapons of war to take full metabolic possession of the bodies of conquered populations. It may well turn out that Afghanistan with its defeat of spatial warfare may be prelude to what's coming next: metabolic war as terror from the ground and, with that, the conquest of forms of armed resistance that depend on the implacable strength of endurance over long durations.

Out of present defeat, the seeds of future victory. Flip space and time, reverse terror from the air into terror from the ground, and the withdrawal at Kabul will likely vanish into a time of war that has no limits. A future of distributed lethality.

Wars come and go, but the war machine is never defeated. It learns its lessons, it bides its time, it spins, it mutates, it adapts, it experiments, it withdraws only into future victories.

Thesis 2: Afghanistan as Intensive Military Experiment

General Sherman Takes to Drone Warfare

In his famous post-Civil War memoir, General Sherman was fond of repeating his advice to the citizens of Atlanta protesting their forced evacuation from the city: "War is cruelty and you cannot refine it ... You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war."⁵⁴

54 William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General G.T. Sherman* (New York: The Library of America, 1990), 601.

From the Civil War onwards, the US military has never seriously deviated from Sherman's grim vision of the essence of war. "War is cruelty" would go on to become the implicit narrative for many other military campaigns: the carpet bombing of Vietnam by lethal munitions and poisonous chemicals; the mass murder from the air that was the firebombing of Dresden and many other German cities and towns; the first-time use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As the Hollywood script for the movie *Lawless* goes, it's not so much the use of violence that counts, but how far you are willing to go with that violence. Following this script perfectly, the US military has protected the homeland, garrisoned military bases most everywhere in the world, and won a still-expanding global empire in the process, and all this by taking seriously the glint-eyed advice of General Sherman. "The crueler it is, the sooner it will be over." True to this ethic, the US military is one lethal machine, powered up, lock n' loaded, always ready to go.

Which is why it's so disconcerting to hear so many media commentators, and even politicians, complaining about the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, most joining a new media refrain quickly gaining steam, namely that the US, just like the Soviet Empire before it, lost the War in Afghanistan, effectively turning off the lights at the Bagram Air Base and disappearing in the dead of night rather than suffer the humiliation of a public withdrawal of troops. Nothing could be further from the truth. Clearly, the US won the War in Afghanistan, but for reasons of public consumption the military cannot spell out the reasons why. Forget, of course, the publicly stated rationale for the war: hunting down Osama Bin Laden, defeating al Qaeda, liberating progressive young Afghan women from tribal orthodoxies, democratic nation-building, stabilizing an always volatile region. Most of the above were part of an immensely successful public relations campaign which is, of course, always an indispensable part of the logic of the war machine. Some objectives were achieved; many weren't. In the end, it's all muddled in the wash waiting for some historian of the future to weigh the scales of truth on the Afghan campaign.

However, viewed from a purely military perspective, the Afghan War was a great success as "proof of concept" of the effectiveness of drone warfare on battlefields of the future. Since fleets of drones – flying on automatic and controlled by remote operators – will comprise the essence of military "projections of power" delivered from the air in all future military campaigns, Afghanistan provided an unparalleled opportunity for the US military to test the effectiveness of drone warfare, to work out communication challenges involving long-distance remote control, to innovate swarms of drones, packed with AI, capable

of communicating with one another. This speeds up the day when humans, particularly American presidents, could be removed completely from always debatable decision-making on targeted kills, and, best of all, to experiment with “double tap” strategies for terrorizing earthbound Afghan civilians and warriors alike down below. General Sherman would undoubtedly smile from the grave.

What’s more, it was not only success in proofing drones as state-of-the-art warfare, but the war also paid off in major collateral wins, not least of which involves the global battle for control of oil distribution. Not just drones in the air but also brand spanking new pipelines on the ground delivering up oil from the Caspian Sea basin to Western markets, with the latter quietly negotiated with representatives of the Taliban. And while media might be carping about the stealthy departure of US military personal from Bagram Air Base, that is certainly a more media friendly optic than the Vietnam nightmare visual that is still on most military folks’ minds these days – that hapless, panicked scene of helicopters landing on the roof of the American embassy in what was then known as Saigon. That was an image of empire in ruins.

Now that the military has generated its drone warfare data for immediate projection to other theatres of battle, with Yemen leading the way, the stage was perfectly set for a withdrawal, quietly in the dead of night, a military force still glowing from its proof of concept of a new technological wrinkle in the cruelties of war, very much a big win strategy for a battle-hardened empire forever on the rise.

General Sherman takes to drone warfare.

Y

Yesteryear Futurism

Cock of the (Space) Walk

Richard Branson? He’s the perfect publicity hound, capturing the global media narrative on a sunny summer day, holding the worldwide media chorus in breathless, spellbound fascination. Great, and what’s better, *free* publicity for Virgin Galactic as the obvious go to place for space tourism of the future. The place to see and be seen in space travel where it seems, if the media narrative is to be believed, we’re all just

crazy yearning to sign up. Fabulous publicity, too, for Richard Branson himself in the colossal media brew up that is the all-new, breaking news “Battle of the Billionaires,” that sprawling media fight for cock of the (space) walk title between Richard Branson and Jeff Bezos of Blue Origin. Sort of like watching a heavyweight title fight between two hustling, immensely talented, fabulously wealthy white guy contenders, physically undistinguished perhaps, but both definitely flying high on the wings of swollen egos, all aided and abetted by an adoring media chorus.

But that’s not fair. Of course, for anyone with a passing acquaintance with contemporary literature, Tom Wolfe’s eloquent description of Chuck Yeager’s courageous test-pilot prototyping of near-earth space flight many decades ago had Yeager doing it earlier, better, certainly at higher risk to life and limb, and definitely with that just so cool, tapped-down calm voice, transmitting data while in out-of-control space free-fall dive, looking death straight in the face, flying a plane that was actually bouncing off the walls of the atmosphere and living to tell the tale, and all this in that understated, steady-state voice, supercool, test-pilot swagger. But that was Yeager and this is Branson. One a cold-eyed test pilot riding at the edge of life and death as just part of that day’s job routine, and the other the first of all the space tourists out for a market scarcity first, a hyperspace, hyperexperience, a talented, super-creative, hyperimaginative, cutting edge innovative, rich guy, one of the true blue creative types who has got the big bucks to make his private fantasies *our* public reality.

And we got to say his fantasies are like a beautifully flaring rocket aiming straight for the stars at high speed. Now, some might be so churlish as to mention that it seems many members of the billionaires club these days seem to be planning hasty exits from planet earth to much hoped-for extraplanetary shelters above. In fact, survivalism is all the rage. Survival shelters for earthbound protection from the much-feared and equally much-fantasied gathering mobs after the unfolding apocalypse of climate change, financial meltdowns, political turmoil. People who can afford it taking shelter from the storm. But why not take the panic exit strategy one hyperspace step further, namely tap into exit fever a bit at a time, first as a tourist on brief space travel to the apogee of earth’s noosphere and, maybe later, permanently as a fleeing pilgrim to the stars. It all seems to be going that way. Everybody’s who’s anybody seems to be into the survivalist game. And why not? We’re now living future cinematic scenarios of apocalypse in fast time: a pandemic that just does not seem to want to go away – one shot, two shots, three shots, with maybe more in the offing; climate change that slams into the

human condition with heat extremes, dried-out drought lands, freaky weather, melting sea ice, dying fish; and a global political scene that is doing its level best to give all the signs of being out of control and, for that matter, seems to be energized by all the passing waves of chaos.

With all that in (daily) mind, Richard Branson's jog to space might turn out to be just the good time distraction that a beleaguered global population desperately needs. Like all seductive media stories, it has enticing spins. Certainly the always present threat of death as this the first of all the space pilgrims does not really know in his heart of hearts if the final trajectory of this, his private flight fantasy, is to be a safe, space-tourist excursion or abruptly culminate in suicide, with his body so much biojunk drifting among the stars. And, of course, the struggle for cock of the (space) walk between Branson and Bezos may turn out, in the end, to be brilliantly simulated in the business interests of media networks always looking to game the news of the day, but still, in this time of pandemic fever, there's probably nothing better than a new sure-to-be Netflix serial about the battle of space-age male testosterone rocketing its fading way to the starry skies above.

Z Zoom Kids

We see it everywhere: kids chained, like the inhabitants of Plato's cave, to the screen. No longer free to roam about, no longer free to exit to the playground – quarantined and enduring a Zoom class with their parents. Bored out of minds that have been appropriated by the teacher. But, all of a sudden, we have reached critical mass where the media world is taking a leap from social media into quantum life mediation. It is into this world that kids have reached escape velocity; soon to rise from the cave of lockdown orders to the high-speed world of the sun. Enter the quantum world that cannot be controlled because it is always both here and there. Just as the individual can now be in many places at once.

And it was a war strategy that precipitated the release. The first rule is not to be seen or heard by the enemy. In former days, one can only shoot when you can see the whites of the eyes. Today, naturally, it is whether you can be seen on the computer screen. So, it is that the Zoom class has ushered in a wormhole to reach a different reality. Immediately the

children seize on the video and mute buttons. In a realization of a quantum field, they are like virtual particles that appear and then disappear with the click of the finger. And equally as fast from speech to silence. All that is left is the afterimage on the screen – a name, a picture, a blank space – the background radiation. A target always impossible to hit for the teacher as the very aiming changes the speed and location of the kids – as one sees in the beginning of the quantum revolution initiated by Werner Heisenberg.

But it is even more than this. From the beginning, the play of the visible and the invisible has been a sign of culture focused on the spectrum of wave light. A photon-based surveillance, the overseer of visibility. It even named Paris; Paris as the city of light – once the street lighting was in place to deter criminals, forcing them back into the shadows. Or the bunker whose archaeology was to hide the viewer. And so, it is now with stealth bombers whose profile eludes the detection by radar. Or maybe it is now the video cameras in London, surely the most in the world outside of China. Or the heat-seeking missiles that work on the thermal profile of excited atoms or the drones that target with their GPS – and the list goes on.

As to the kids, here are a few tales, from one family – familiar to all. One kid logs into class for the attendance check and then promptly mutes audio and video, disappearing and leaving only a name on the screen. If something interesting happens the video is clicked and the kid suddenly appears. The second kid logs in, leaving both video and audio on but quickly disappears from the camera view to play with the games in the room. The third actually enjoys Zooming and fully participates in the class though longs to be in charge in order to be able to mute their classmates. The fourth, the youngest, promptly rolls over into the foetal position of boredom. And lastly, the oldest enters the class with video and sound turned off. Then promptly exists the class only to reenter two minutes later. This pattern is repeated, a water drip torture for quantum times, until the besieged teacher cries foul.

Of course, the kids grow up – hopefully. They get better at Zooming. Some are in classes where one never hears or sees the person; zero contact for pandemic times. Others, hardly miss a beat in videoing their rooms as part of the social dance. Others, enjoy their food or at a minimum their drinks, or share their pets, which command considerable views. For others, the chat eclipses the old messaging system of swapped notes for the parallel processing of the new communication. Others, like the commentator on CNN, are caught with, so to speak, their pants down. The learning curve is not the same for all.

Zoom Kids as initiators of the first degree of freedom for a new generation in the quantum world.

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3. *WAVE AESTHETICS:*

ART OF RESURGENCE/VECTORS OF EXTINCTION IN THE QUANTUM DIMENSION

In the beginning, there are waves. For it is out of these waves, these fields, where mass and energy are interchangeable, that the world as we know it comes into being. This is the theory of quantum dynamics where the wave is the basic component that constitutes nature – ourselves included. In its mathematical form, it is an equation expressing the probability of finding wave/particles – depending on position, momentum, spin, and time. With that the Newtonian world of solid matter and stable facts quickly dissolves into radical uncertainty and fluid indeterminacy. Everything suddenly a matter of probability – of the probability associated with the amplitude of the wave. Everything in flight, with positions indeterminate: momentum accelerating, velocity diminishing; liquid time stretching out, compressing, imploding, extending, and jumping into new dimensions; everything a function of the energy field, everything ultimately a matter of vector momentum, variable positions, fast spins, and multidimensional space/time.

And more than that as the waves interact bringing new configurations into being: some to disappear immediately as the wave amplitudes cancel each other out, some reinforced to create new configurations and some through entanglement create new bodies from high-mass Higgs particles. In this coexistence of vectors, we see particles change colour, change spin, venture off to new worlds, and even annihilate themselves.

This is not delirious dreaming or futuristic fiction, but the mathematical imagination drawing into visibility the hidden real, in a new form of Marx's famous expression that "all that is solid melts into the air," signalling the quantum revolution. Here, the eclipse of solid matter transforms the essence of contemporary reality. In effect, the quantum imaginary represents the end of bounded rationality, the liquidation of bounded reality. So, it is also with the universe of our sensations, of our senses, becoming one of hypersensations.

All augmented reality constantly moving in and out of senses that now require the prosthetics of technology: seeing, hearing, touch, taste, smell; all transformed into new dimensions, all requiring a new ascetic – the Wave Aesthetic.

The Wave Aesthetic as the reimagining of the world ushered in by the quantum revolution. A revolution that is the imaginary of the future anticipating, generations in advance, radical transformations in the logic of the real. Hyper-sensitive to the shifting tremors of scientific consciousness, attuned to technology because it is itself a matter of aesthetic technique, skilled in the many languages of perception – visual, sonic, dance, photography, mixed media – always working at that complicated edge where the human adventure mixes it up with the elementary matter of nature – air, earth, fire, water.

Out of this comes the Wave Aesthetics manifesting itself in the creative activities where the future, impatient with the slow passage of time, first shows up, first presents itself in all its elementary logic to be painted, sculpted, constructed, filmed, imaged, scanned, performed and, sometimes even, to scale up and reboot in spectacular creations of the aesthetic imagination before its actual historical realization.

Travel down the gravity well of the aesthetic that leads directly, immediately, to the nerve centre of things, to dynamic event-scenes disguised as paintings on gallery walls, sculptures in the landscape, designed spaces, performances, installations across the urban scene, dances, sound experiments or viral vectors on the radio, and video screens, images spun deliriously, incommensurable photography, spinning like vortices that just won't stop. Here, everything is in play, in motion, sometimes frozen in suspended aesthetic animation, performed at the height of its times. But always, the aesthetic as an event-scene, a beautiful horizon drawing into it all the energies of the social that surrounds it, expelling streams of images, sound, and movements, but, all the while, congealing the hidden truth of times present and past, but most of all of *time future*, into aesthetic productions stamped with the dual signs of harbinger and hauntology.

Here the way of the future is the quantum imaginary. It functions as the fatal precession of the aesthetic: prognostications of the future in a hidden alphabet for all to see if one can decipher its riddles, unscramble its meaning, decode its event horizon. And when that happens, when quantum imagination is stressed to the point of revealing its aesthetic breakthroughs, its perspectival transformations, everything just suddenly spills out like a wonderful gift on hyper-drive.

Art of Resurgence/Vectors of Extinction

What follows in this section is a canvas of the quantum imagination – Wave Aesthetics. It is what is happening in contemporary times. Consider the description of the most consequential wave of them all – climate crisis – an essay which focuses on a specific ecological action that is happening at this moment – Ecological Death and Fairy Creek – with its hundreds of people arrested by police forces on Vancouver Island for standing up for the preservation of precious old growth forests, with its artworks by Indigenous and Indigenous inspired artists motivated by visions of new ways of living ecologically. Against this alliance of protesters and artists stand the forces of denial and aggression – old growth logging with the enthusiastic support of private logging companies, the provincial government, the court system, and, of course, the RCMP, which seems bent on silencing progressive dissent. What we have here in microcosm is what the French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari has described as the violence of “integrated world capitalism”⁵⁵ with its indifference to nature, its politics of nostalgia, and its clear-cutting mentality, whether with respect to the destruction of nature or human nature. How we achieved Ecological Death is the story traced, in all its creativity and brutality, by Wave Aesthetics. Aesthetically, it is the story that is told by the contemporary Indigenous artist, Nadia Myre, whose artistic creations – *Indian Act* and *The Scar Project* – rise triumphant from the attempted genocide of Indigenous land-based culture by white settler colonialism. In a different key, it is also the story told by the artist Kiki Smith in her haunting paintings – *Wolf Girl*, *Woman Trailing Blood*, *My Blue Lake*, *Born* – which focus on women’s bodies, their deformations, mutations, beautiful transformations, and healing processes. Or consider other stories, often related visually by young contemporary artists – Keiko Hart, Adrienne Matheuszik, naakita feldman-kiss – as well as by established Indigenous artists like Jackson 2bears, all of whom commonly signal what is happening in this time of dual deaths: the death of nature and social death. Here, new aesthetic strategies for coping with a contemporary culture in terminal spin are eloquently articulated – *Remix Identity*, *Datamoshing*, *The future will be fine...*, and *Intimacy and Memory for a Time of Lonesome*. All of this occurs in the midst of the hard reality of the quantum revolution with its

55 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

fast-moving vortices: *Drones Skies Raining Murder*, *AI Goes Psychic*, *Bodies with 4D organs in the Fifth Dimensional Plane*, *Harvesting the Brain*, *Cold War Redux*, and *Rebels Fighting for the Right to be Sick*. But through it all, there remain neon dreams and intimations of empathy, definitely in the singular presences of Kathy Acker, Marilouise Kroker, and Sheila Cook, but also everywhere now in the contemporary artistic imagination.

But all this is prelude to understanding what lies just beneath the surface of contemporary consciousness, something that can only be discovered by patiently descending into the genealogical depths of the quantum revolution. In this case, while contemporary art serves as awesome counter-gradients to the violence of contemporary times, the core logic of increasingly nihilistic societies was put in place long ago and has been waiting all these years on gallery walls for someone to decipher its enigma. For example, consider the portal to the quantum era opened up by Auguste Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. An invitation to enter the promised land where in Rodin's words "all is movement." Here one is faced with the kinetic geometry, the field where the energy of sacrifice and death becomes a precursor to hell, to the black holes of discovery that will follow. And indeed, a universe of social black holes did follow in the paintings of Francis Bacon. A social field of electrical dynamics, of X-rays that map the social field as it plunges, as it gutters out in in the triptychs in the slaughterhouse of violated bodies. No longer being but becoming; becoming virtual as the differentiation of the virtual field yields the network of digital life. But the quantum world is an array of operators that charts the transformation from one state to another. This is evident in Marcel Duchamp, who drew from physics a multidimensional world. A world of virtual shifts captured in his famous set ups that created holes in time between his bachelors and brides as he left the Euclidean world behind. Enter then into a new politics cited by Jean-François Lyotard, where the citizen becomes the quantum citizen. Just as the Euclidean world had to be left behind as the universe heated up – heated up with fire and thermal dynamics. So, it is as well with the sculpted body, at the hands of Alberto Giacometti. What we witness in Giacometti is the quantum vacuum, the quantum void that engulfs the body which dematerializes in the very gaze of one's eyes. A new sculpture that turns into the antisculpture of the quantum imaginary. But, of course, while the artistic imagination of Bacon, Giacometti, Duchamp, and Rodin provided early warning signals of a big change coming in the reality-principle itself

with the blast of kinetic energy, data trash bodies, virtual selves, probability functions, thermodynamics, stochastic processes, and human flesh led to the slaughterhouse, it was left to contemporary artists such as Kiki Smith, Nadia Myre, Jackson 2bears, Keiko Hart, and naakita feldman-kiss to live and create in the heat blast of a world dominated by trajectories of catastrophe. Now as ever, the artistic imagination loops past and present – past warnings and present realities. Indeed, when it comes to art, the fabric of time and space has always been fluid, dynamic, and liquid with part of art often strikingly futuristic and contemporary art haunting intimations of a catastrophe long predicted.

But it is not just on the canvas and in sculpture that one finds the wave aesthetic for space itself is transformed under the architectural imagination. Take, as an example, the walk-in montages of Edward Kienholz where we enter the whore house or the accident scene. Each rife with the sexism, racism, and violence of the American Empire facing its decline at the *Pacific Wall*. Indeed, it was against this killing apparatus that the group at *Forensic Architecture* took on the reconstitution of event-scenes and by simulation and real-time construction finally establishing the “real” of what transpired. The blend of architecture as built environment, art as the imagination that provides the key to reconstituting the real, and digital creativity, all allowing the truth to appear. Today, we have not escaped from the death machine as the turn towards authoritarianism grows and with it grows the control of borders as well as behaviour. It is this world, that of the “contract killer,” that inspires the creativity of Jacques Monory as well. Each of the signature concepts of the social are reversed, starting with the state of nature turned into the site of detritus under the chilling blue that pervades his work that captures the stars in the telescopic world of techno science. Just as the capitalist state carries out the assassination of sensation captured in the criminal ballistics of the starry events – all killed by the photon leaving us with the universe of death.

Thus, the following essays where trajectories of aesthetic artists, contemporary and past, are probed, prodded, and provoked to reveal what’s really at stake in their artistic productions, to bring into visibility their intimations of key waves of the future, to literally make such waves sparkle as decisive pathways to understanding contemporary society. And along with the aesthetic imagination goes the entanglement with critical thought of theorists, writers, philosophers, digital visionaries that together produce the Wave Aesthetic.

FOLD 1: ECOLOGICAL DEATH

Image removed at the request of the rights holder

Figure 29. Dawna Mueller, *Worth More Standing*. Courtesy of Dawna Mueller Photography.

Ecological Death and Fairy Creek

And what more evidence do we need. The volcano that erupted in the Congo, or in Tonga with the tsunami, the fires in Paradise California, in New South Wales, Australia, or in the Interior of BC as well as the floods from weather bombs, the scorching heat extending

even into the Artic. The list is long and well known and is growing. But it is now no longer just the degrading of the ecological balance but an open confluence of the cultural, social, and political with the catastrophe now across the spectrum. A destruction that threatens ecological death, not only nature, but a way of life, a culture, and the rights of individuals – yet again for money. Witness what is transpiring in Fairy Creek, BC.

Fairy Creek situated on the territory of the Pacheedaht First Nation, with support from the nearby Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations, all on unceded traditional lands. Surrounding the Indigenous settlement is one of the few old growth forests left on lower Vancouver Island. Yet, it is under attack. Attacked from all sides. Attacked by the Teal Jones Group who wish to log the forest. Attacked by the NDP government who refuse to ban the logging. Attacked by the BC Court of Appeal in a unanimous verdict to limit protest. Attacked by the RCMP who stunningly attacked the protesters. Attacked by the lack of response from the majority of the population. Attacked by even some Indigenous people who wish to benefit from the economic gain.

We know though what is at stake. Take this photo above by Dawna Mueller, *Worth More Standing*, who is part of the Eden Grove Artists in Residence Program, whose curator is Jessie Demers. These are artists on the land near the logging sites of Fairy Creek. Artists documenting what will be lost as this old growth tree represents a heritage that takes hundreds even thousands of years to make. The old growth tree symbolic, of course, of the natural world but also of the integral part the forest played in the Indigenous communities. But in addition, a reminder to all of important values that we will see in some of the artwork done in Fairy Creek.

Once the logging started it was only a matter of time until protesters began arriving. Recourse then by the company to the courts to bar the protesters and then to the police to enforce the ban. Media coverage followed eventually with even the reporters themselves being caught up in the arrests of more than one thousand protesters. The police actions were shocking in their disregard for individuals: both their rights and their safety. Camera footage showed the police pepper-spraying people after forcibly removing their COVID-19 face masks, destroying protesters property, forcibly removing protesters from encampments where they were tied to objects all the while minimizing the ability to be recognized by wearing “thin blue line” badges often attached to riot jackets. The judge even raised the matter of police exercising intimidation with little check on their conduct. And little check on police spending which was in the order of \$7 million – a veritable war in the woods. All of this came out in the court and led to a temporary suspension of the injunction.

Yet, in its January 2022 ruling the BC Court of Appeal supported the logging company, overturning the lower court's ruling that found that the police enforcement of the original injunction was an infringement of civil liberties. The appellate court found that the company could proceed without interference from civil disobedience. The court had no view on the question of the old growth nor on climate change. Kathleen Code of the Rainforest Flying Squad noted the incredible rights of enforcement given to a private corporation. Hardly a surprise though where capital interests are at stake. In fact, the court's decision underscores the disregard for rights claims based on the harm that people face if the logging goes forward. All of which was ignored for measuring only the harm to the corporation. A sad day for justice.

The contrast to the judicial process, where the Pacheedaht were not even given a voice, as compared to Indigenous ways of deciding matters, is stark. While not without tensions stemming from the Indian Act and the colonial period where hereditary chiefs are often in tension with band leaders, Heather Kai Smith reminds us of the circles



Figure 30. Heather Kai Smith, *Reciprocity*, coloured pencil on paper, 22" x 30", made as an uninvited guest on Pacheedaht Territory, Eden Grove. Courtesy of the artist.

that involve the community are part of many aspects of Indigenous life. Here, she sketches one aptly named “Reciprocity.” Indeed, one of the consequences of the intertwining of cultures occasioned by the ecological event is to both broaden the field and to involve others. This follows a dynamic pattern: as the protest movement increased in Fairy Creek, it also saw outbreaks across the country and the globe.

It is in the very nature of the quantum world that this interweaving of various forces is neither predictable nor linear. Yet, as we know from the study of quantum thermodynamics, outbreaks of events happen. The famous example is the butterfly effect often used in climate modelling. Here, as the analogy goes, a butterfly flapping its wings can induce a different weather pattern elsewhere on the globe – just as it is unpredictable as to the precise location of particles in any system. What appears as chaos though may be subject to an attractor such as thermal energy as we see in climate change or other attractors such as the media outside the natural world. Take the by now well-known spread of the ecological protest led by Greta Thunberg. We have seen outbreaks across the globe of young people inspired by her protest, which began by her refusal to go to class – in itself not normally an event notable outside her local area. In Canada, fifteen young people have launched the Young Climate Lawsuit arguing from the Charter that Section 7 “the right to life, liberty and security of person” is violated owing to the damage of climate change as well as Section 15 “the right to equality” as youth are disproportionately affected by the lack of action. Similar groups of young people can be found scattered across the world. Beyond the geographical spread, we see, like in Fairy Creek, the expansion of the harm of ecological policy to aspects of life and to many new groups.

Nothing better illustrates the dynamism of the ecological protest than the artwork of Rande Cook, Chief Makwala. According to his biography, he is a hereditary Kwakwaka’wakw Chief from Alert Bay whose #TreeOfLife campaign brings artists and scientists together to increase awareness of the destruction of the old growth ecological system.⁵⁶ His work includes craft and carving along with his painting. Let us begin with his 2021 *Emerald Forest*, a work that is striking for its energy as a forest that is filled with spirits. Here, the forest is alive not just as a set of trees that grow but as a kindred form of life. It is a powerful reminder and depiction of what is threatened by the invasion of the loggers.

56 See “Rande Cook,” Eden Grove Artists in Residence Program, <http://www.edengroveair.com>.



Figure 31. Indigenous Chief Makwala, *Emerald Forest*. Credit: Leaf Modern Gallery.

In another work from 2021 entitled *Grandma Tree* we see another aspect of the forest. With a yellow cedar base and red cedar face Cook captures the important role that we know Elders and especially women Elders can play in Indigenous families. Here, a type of mother earth combined with mother nature.



Figure 32. Indigenous Chief Makwala, *Grandma Tree*. Courtesy of the artist. Credit: Leaf Modern Gallery.

Finally, his artwork is brought together in a powerful combination. Here he is pictured in a clear-cut on his Ma'amtaglia territory. What is striking is the contrast of the clear-cut to the forest as yet untouched. This gives rise to the dynamism of the carvings that surrounds him. Carvings that capture the spiritual dimension of the land that is threatened by the clear-cut. A spirituality enveloping animals, who are also threatened with extinction by the loss of the old growth, as well as his Indigenous heritage. It is this drawing together of these elements depicted in art that gives Cook's work a power that adds to his role as a Chief. It is also a powerful reminder that the ecological and commercial threat cannot be measured in profit and loss as so much of our exploitation of Indigenous lands has shown; we need to be aware of the threat to the very foundation of life.



Figure 33. Photo of Chief Makwala. Credit: Spartan Media Group.

Thus, the energy and flow of Indigenous art joins alongside the world of quantum culture. Kinetic art pulsating everywhere: energy overflowing from the life of the forest, energy in the fluidity of time from the beginning, energy in the Bands and the Councils. All a fluid entanglement of technology that conquered the skies and waters, a technology exploded from the lived experience of a data stream that today

reappears in the data flow of the quantum revolution. New visions displacing the stasis of the lonely planet for the speedrunners of culture wishing to escape the hold of the colonial mind. Here, joining the quantum individual in pursuit of escape velocities.

This velocity can be sensed as one looks at the old growth forest. Along with Dawna Mueller's sole tree in her *Worth More Standing* and also with Mike Andrew McLean and his photograph we can see the opening of new approach to the forest. Mueller suggests that part of the old growth environment might be opened for others to visit under an expansion of what the Pacheedaht already have done for camping. Here might be a revenue stream that would be attractive and preserve the forest. A glimpse of what this might look like is given by McLean, whose appeal to the NDP government is to recognize the importance of the forests by having part accessible. The art below captures part of this.

Whatever happens, Fairy Creek has moved the consciousness and understanding of many by showing what the ecological catastrophe would destroy and how this is what is now transpiring over so much of the world. Time now to see that the disaster of the Canadian courts, police, politicians, and corporate interests needs fixing now before we all face ecological death.



Figure 34. Mike Andrew McLean, *Please, John, don't screw this up for the rest of us – Version 3 (Staircase)*, 2021, 3 colour digichromatographic process. Courtesy of the artist.

Vector 1: Ecological Death by Bombing

We are now all familiar with the weather bombs and the atmospheric energy streams that spell ecological disaster: rain, floods, snow, hail, droughts, tsunamis, tornadoes, oceans rising, water reservoirs depleted, permafrost melting, glaciers disappearing, temperatures rising, vegetation disappearing, species disappearing, and ultimately the menace of ecological death for us all.

This is the world we send the young into to save. And no better example of this new consciousness is Jill Peltó, a young artist and scientist, who has, in ten paintings reproduced in the *Smithsonian Magazine*, captured the effects of the global climate crisis.⁵⁷ Her first entry is a graphic reminder of the entanglement of the climate. Here, we have the elements of being on earth: the sun, the ocean, the ice fields, the fires, the desecrated forests all signalling the loss of habitat. An interesting blend of art and

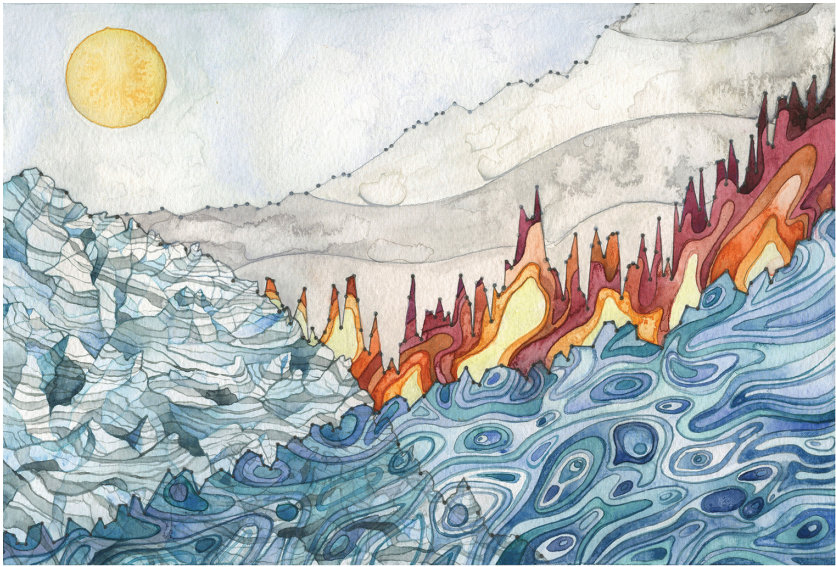


Figure 35. Jill Peltó, *Landscape of Change*. Courtesy of the artist.

⁵⁷ Maris Fessenden, "These Watercolor Paintings Actually Include Climate Change Data," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 11 March 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/these-watercolor-paintings-actually-include-climate-change-data-180958374/>.

science that details the destruction of the earth as glaciers recede leaving mud and rubble, of salmon threatened by the loss of water in the rivers and what water there is too warm to spawn, or the growing acidification of the oceans, or of the smoke clouds from fire burning being carried kilometres away, or the threatened loss of the Artic Fox, or the loss in the rainforests both threatening to increase the carbon release and endangering even the tiger. All proceeding together at an ever-accelerating pace, all a fluid flow feeding into each other all bespeaking a war zone that is global.

The climate change induced by human activity began in the industrial revolution. England's industrial revolution was captured nicely in William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* with the juxtaposition of "England's mountains green" against "these dark Satanic mills."⁵⁸ Today the Satanic mills are most often to be forest fires such as the one depicted by Peltó.

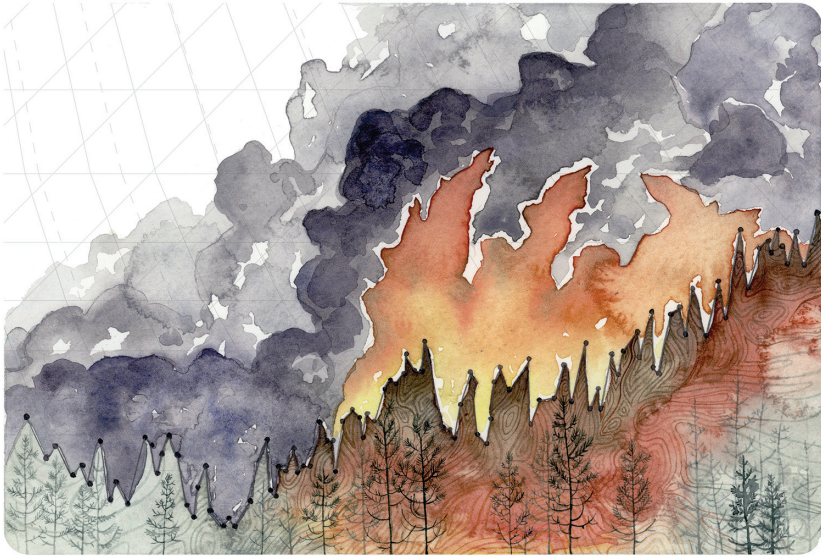


Figure 36. Jill Peltó, *Increasing Forest Fire Activity*. Courtesy of the artist.

The science of the heat engine dates back to the revolution in thermal dynamics in the nineteenth century. A counterpart to the quantum

58 William Blake, "Jerusalem," in *Preface to Milton a Poem* (1810), Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54684/jerusalem-and-did-those-feet-in-ancient-time>.

dynamics that will come shortly after the new understanding of how energy in the form of heat can transform the world. This understanding was articulated in a pathbreaking analysis by Sadie Carnot in France. Following on the analysis of his father Lazare Carnot, he challenged the centrality of Euclidean geometry, the backbone of capitalist enterprise, which finally gave rise to the science of topology. Topology was spatial in its understanding of phenomena, and it was this shift that prepared for the science of how engines work. While Carnot's *Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire* is concerned predominately with articulating the binary of hot and cold in the workings of heat engines per se, at the beginning of his manuscript he casts the study in a much broader context of the overall importance of heat/fire to understanding the world. It is a remarkable description of what was to come to pass. Here is how he expresses it:

Everyone knows that heat can produce motion. That it possesses vast motive-power no one can doubt, in these days when the steam engine is everywhere so well known.

To heat also are due vast movements which take place on earth. It causes the agitations of the atmosphere, the ascension of clouds, the fall of rain and of meteors, the currents of water which channels the surface of the globe, and of which man has thus far employed but a small portion. Even earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are the result of heat.⁵⁹

And after Carnot comes the science of Lord Kelvin. The science of thermodynamics, like quantum physics, captures dynamic activity that is entangled with each force of nature. Driven by the very nature of heat, its interactions with every system are composed of unpredictable elements in quantum uncertainty. From the sun and its movement to the butterfly effect that precipitates outbreaks as chaos theory outstrips linear thinking. But in a world where heat death is lurking everywhere.

Vector 2: Ecological Death and Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*

Everywhere among the young, well-justified dissatisfaction grows with the damaged world left them by the baby boom generation – a generation that rode the rocket of capital extraction of everything that there was to be

59 Sadi Carnot, *Reflections on the Motive Power of Heat on Machines Fitted to Develop That Power*, ed. R.H. Thurston, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1897), 37–8.

extracted, whether in nature or in human nature, to phenomenal economic prosperity, leaving a detrital future of violated nature, monopolistic technological platforms, and overpriced housing to those who would come later. With critically engaged social movements like Extinction Rebellion, the youth strike movement, and animal rights movement, global consciousness grows concerning the depth and severity of unconstrained assault on finite nature and equally precarious human subjectivity. Following the science, we are definitely headed for the extinction-event, with only the timing of the final catastrophe in question. With privileged societies of both the West and the East leading the way, everywhere there are signs now of global society in slow suicide, speeding down the freeway of capitalist extraction on the way to intensive care. The salt waters of ocean rise inexorably, summer air is polluted with the smoke of burning forests, animal species go extinct, forests are harvested most savagely, atmospheric rivers of rain overwhelm entire communities, and raging fires with their wild energetics light up the horizon. With every passing day, it becomes more obvious that ecological death is a general civilizational crisis, an extinction-event that has its origins as much in deformations of the human psyche and damaging social practices as it does in unconstrained, unrelieved assaults on nature. In this case, what we do to nature is a perfect mirror of what we have first done to ourselves.

Which is why Félix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* is such an important intervention. A persuasive, forceful intervention on the question of ecological death, *The Three Ecologies* provides a relentless diagnosis of its capitalist axiomatics, its machinic consciousness, its form of subjugation, but also its possibilities for soft subversion, for forms of resistance against the driving force of ecological death – the capitalist episteme. Indeed, Guattari once said “that we have the unconscious that we deserve.” In which case, *The Three Ecologies* is about discovering ways of going beyond what the philosopher Hannah Arendt once called “negative being” and drawing into visibility the unconscious that we do not necessarily deserve, but desperately need for survival. Guattari is adamant in his assertion that ecological death has its origins not only in the destruction of the natural environment, but equally in destructive practices in psychic life and social arrangements. In which case there can be no satisfactory response to ecological death which does not speak directly to the radical separation of nature, psyche, and the social in contemporary experience. So then, for Guattari, an end to the *isolation* of the environment, the psyche, and the *socius* and the opening up of new cartographies of human imagination – a generalized ecology, an “ecosophy,” an “ecology of the imaginary” – that resists capitalist subjectivity and power under the sign of the commodity-form. For him,

“(T)here is at least the risk that there will be no more human history unless humanity undertakes a radical reconsideration of itself.”⁶⁰ Consider the following three propositions implicit to *The Three Ecologies*:

Generalized Extinction

It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity. A stifling cloak of silence has been thrown over the emancipator struggles of women, and of the new proletariat: the unemployed, the “marginalized” immigrant.⁶¹

Integrated World Capitalism

Integrated World Capitalism forms massive subjective aggregates from the most personal – one could say intra-personal – existential givens, which it hooks up to ideas of race, national, the professional workplace, competitive sports, a dominating masculinity, and mass media celebrity. Capitalistic subjectivity seeks to gain power by controlling and neutralizing the maximum number of existential terrains. It is intoxicated with and aestheticized by a collective feeling of pseudo-eternity.⁶²

The Overall Ecosophical Question

Environmental ecology, as it exists today, has barely begun to prefigure the generalized ecology that I advocate here, the aim of which will be to radically decentre social struggles and ways of coming to one’s own psyche. Current ecological movements certainly have merit, but in truth I think that the overall ecosophical question is too important to be left to some of its usual archaizers and folklorists, who sometimes deliberately refuse any large-scale political involvement. Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists. Ecology in my sense questions the whole of capitalist subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue.⁶³

60 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 46.

61 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 29.

62 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 34.

63 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 35.

It is almost as if *The Three Ecologies* is the background theoretical text for understanding the events of Fairy Creek. Everything at this fateful ecological struggle on Vancouver Island speaks to the core theses of *The Three Ecologies*: the powerful sense of *collective solidarity* among protesters, many young but also many, many old, on isolated logging roads, speaking directly on behalf of three-thousand-year-old trees, fighting generalized indifference, shattering the “cloak of silence”; the direct confrontation here as well as elsewhere in energy-based struggles of ecological resistance against *integrated world capitalism* and its active base of strong ideological support in policing, government bureaucracies, the political class, the mass media; and, finally, immediate acknowledgement by all involved in the civilizational struggle that is Fairy Creek that *the overall ecosophical question* has everything to do with a form of political involvement that overcomes the isolation of the natural environment, psychic life, and the socius.

But, of course, the driving force of ecological resistance of this order is based on a radical ontological break of protesters with the reality-principle of integrated world capitalism with, as Guattari states, “its ‘barbaric implosion’ into politics of nostalgia, generalized indifference, ‘neutralization of democracy’ and ‘infantalization of opinion.’”⁶⁴ But, if that is so, it is also the case that the first, beautiful intimations of a new eco-ontology, one which speaks directly to the “barbaric implosion” on its way to ecological death, has its origins in Indigenous imagination, practices, and visions. That is, in fact, the particular significance of Heather Kai Smith’s *Reciprocity*, Indigenous artist and Chief Rande Cook’s *Emerald Forest, Grandma Tree*, and his haunting image of clear-cut inhabited now by the restorative spirits of Indigenous masks, and by Mike Andrew McLean’s haunting photograph, *Staircase*. This is a form of Indigenous-inspired art which speaks directly to the “overall ecosophical question” by introducing by means of courageous aesthetic acts of Indigenous remembrance, memories of another way of overcoming the isolation of natural environment, psychic life, and the socius. In Indigenous-inspired art of this order are to be found the first, radically new, radically necessary signs of a way of thinking about nature/psyche/the social as commonly entangled in a fluid field of dynamic energy called the miracle of life itself. Once again, as this epochal Indigenous art clearly shows, the future will either be Indigenous or it will not be at all.

64 Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 27.

FOLD 2: VIOLENT EVENT HORIZONS

The Pacific Wall of Kienholz/Lyotard

Perhaps, it is just what happens when one reaches the West Coast of America – the “Pacific Wall” as Jean-François Lyotard calls it in a rather obscure and obscured text written in the nineteen seventies. Perhaps, a similar sensation confronted Hitler when, facing the Atlantic, he is turned back towards the immolation of the ground war. Backs to a wall and the scene turns nasty. Backs to the wall and the catastrophe strikes. This will be played out, as we will see, in the fascism and racism all too well known in the binary twin of Amerika/Europe or, if you prefer, Lyotard/Kienholz.

Lyotard, like many of his French colleagues, went to the coast as a “visiting professor.” Sitting in the Geisel Library of the San Diego campus, named evidently after Dr. Seuss, one enters the fantasy world of make believe and children’s rhymes for Geisel, and for Lyotard, as well, rather fanciful stories. In an odd way this is reflected in the library itself, which is unique by being the first library to embrace Google and in having a phantom third floor and with a wall of glass to the Pacific – the virtual coming to rest in the labyrinth and in the gaze over the Pacific – two themes that occupy Lyotard.

And Lyotard is not alone in his fascination in the view. Take for example, the Canadian artist Alex Colville’s haunting work *Pacific 1967*.⁶⁵ Picture the back of a shirtless man looking out of the glass window onto the ocean with a revolver on a table in the foreground. Painted in 1967 this work catches that period of the paroxysms of violence in the US.

Thus, the Geisel Library is where the manuscript of the *Pacific Wall*⁶⁶ was purported to be found. Again, the text, claiming to be unedited, was written putatively by a supposed visiting associate professor who in this case may have not been a professor at all but a “passer by” whose only trace was this text – part of the Deleuzean nomads and the Western

65 David Burnett, *Colville* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 228. See http://www.alexcolville.ca/gallery/alex_colville_1967pacific.

66 Jean-François Lyotard, *Pacific Wall*, trans. Bruce Boone (Venice, CA: The Lapis Press, 1990). A portion of *Pacific Wall*, focused on Kienholz, is reprinted in the more accessible *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 56–68.

line of flight. He then departs back to France. Or, at least, that is how Lyotard tells the story.

Lyotard similarly sends to a friend this “shared” creation/reflection back across the Atlantic Ocean to the French city of L’Orient – perhaps in search of the author or perhaps back to its origins. Nonetheless, the irony is plain in the return to a site of the exhausted European war that will be brought to its end at the Atlantic Wall. L’Orient, as its name suggests, is the east swallowed up by the western advance of the armies. LA will also be the west that overtakes the Atlantic coast in the march of the American empire.

Especially apt as well for Lyotard’s purpose is L’Orient’s history as one of the principal sites of the East Indian Company’s trade in slaves in the past. Part of this insidious past reappears in Edward Kienholz’s art, as we shall see in a moment. Also, L’Orient was a city that was the home to the German submarine fleet. The so-called Keroman Submarine base held thirty submarines in one of the many bunkers of the Atlantic Wall captured eerily at about the same time as Lyotard’s text in Paul Virilio’s *Bunker Archaeology*.⁶⁷ As a result, in the Second World War it was thoroughly bombed by the Allies with more than five hundred high explosives and sixty thousand incendiary bombs in hopes of dislodging the U boats from that vector that is invisible to the eye below the gaze of the Atlantic/Pacific Oceans where resides the substrate of fascism.

So it is the end of the European Empire and the start of American globalism that takes Lyotard himself to the new world becoming a type of tutor from the glorified past of the Greco/Roman civilization. He brings culture to the American/barbarians who are always at the frontier constantly wishing escape velocity into the next phase of the American Empire.

The Pacific Wall, written at the time of Lyotard’s better-known *Libidinal Economy*,⁶⁸ signals his break with the “Marxism” of his earlier writings. Capital, as we shall see, goes from the relations of production back to signalling the principal Caesarean symbol of empire. But no longer Rome the eternal centre, but LA the de-centred fieldscape of the vectors of sun, sea, sky, and desert. The relations of class and class struggle also get shifted to the “libidinal band,” the “screen” where drives are invested in creating a surface capitalism of desires.

As the European empire is eclipsed by the western expansion, the libidinal drive becomes the pure white epidermal screen that characterizes Lyotard’s women – his version of California Girls. So here we have

67 Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archéologie* (Paris: Les Editions du Demi-Cercle, 1991).

68 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

the fantasy of desire in its pure form as the skin of white women. Back again to the fallen virgin, now no longer Georges Bataille's *Dirty*⁶⁹ but a reconstituted pure, clean, racist flesh that will turn all into jealous suitors. In a strange and bizarre fashion Lyotard finds in this "jealousy" the setup of the Nazi "Final Solution." That is a "revenge" against the Jews for being "God's chosen people" seen at the expense of the fragmented and dismembered "German nation." Or, at least, Lyotard simultaneously advances this proposition all the while denouncing it, of course, as too superficial as too much the under the sway of the "white women's skin." On the libidinal band though what does one have other than surface inviting penetration?

Hence the Lyotard politics, that desire for empire and domination, is set up on the "uninhabitable white surfaces" with three roles as Lyotard says: "Pimp, whore, customer."⁷⁰ Roles that are being played out, as irony would have it, in Europe that is now being retooled by the Euro, that has tried to make the Italians, Spanish, and above all the Greeks as little more than gigolos. Parasites to be maintained by the Germans generating a series of rape fantasies centred on the castration by the IMF/ECB! Or for those who escaped with their funds intact, emissaries to America who fantasize about raping the even bigger empire.

For Lyotard, the message was clear enough in California in the recycling of the fascist/racist mentality – in the destruction, the trashing of everything different, everything minor – the naming in essence of the trashing operator in its "greasy foreignness." All become partial drives: Blacks, foreigners, pimps, emperors, presidents, European intellectuals, academics, all expelled to the periphery of the ever-expanding Amerika arriving in LA. There in LA, Lyotard learns of the artworks of Edward Kienholz. It will be the Kienholz "story" that forms the centre of *The Pacific Wall*.⁷¹

Welcome, then, to the home of Edward Kienholz, once of Germany (at least of German heritage), then, of California and, via Berlin, of Hope, Colorado – of all places. Kienholz is the recycler of trash, foremost of Nazi trash – of the radios that splattered Hitler's message now turned to art and incarcerated (but still speaking/broadcasting) in his 1975 *The Cage*. Or choose Kienholz the author of the washboards that become *Brünnhilde* (in the recycled Ring) with her 'Mother's Medal' inscribed by

69 Georges Bataille, *Blue of Noon*, trans. Harry Mathews (London: Marion Boyars, 1986).

70 Lyotard, *Pacific Wall*, 34.

71 The works of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz can be seen at https://lalouver.com/artist.cfm?tArtist_id=91.

Hitler himself. Or choose the combination – radio and washboard – that Kienholz fashions into the *New Gothic* of 1976 a recycling of Grant Wood's *American Gothic* composed of the detritus left to the post-war immigrant.

Or, perhaps, he is equally well known as the maker of “art money,” a pre-emptive quantitative easing, that is, until the IRS stopped him. Or he is reputed as the sculptor of *Roxy's*, the famous whorehouse in Nevada that started Kienholz's career, or, if you prefer European fare, how about the young women “prostitutes” of *The Hoerengracht* of 1987 – a draining, guttering out scene.

But it is not to these montages that Lyotard turned. He turned to the art installation *Five Card Stud*. Originally shown, appropriately enough, in a parking lot in California in 1972, the sculpture was whisked away, having offended the worthies of the museums in LA. The sculpture, again appropriately enough, resurfaced at the *documenta 5* exhibition in Kassel, Germany. Here it was displayed in a circus tent that Lyotard notes was a type of labyrinth for the viewer. But even this reprise was short-lived, as the sculpture would become hidden again as it was swept up to the other Orient by a Japanese collector – not given the light of day until forty years after in 2012, when it finally was on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

So picture a “walk-in” sculpture placed in a darkened tent but with five motor vehicles in a circle, headlights on, illuminating a scene of the castration of a Black “body” by a group of KKK-like figures. All of the figures in the scene are a composite: half human, half car parts. A white woman sits in one of the vehicles throwing up at the scene – a retribution for having a beer with the Black man. Indeed, the cars, they circle, on the one hand Wagner-like, in warrior “ring” fashion, and on the other hand like the circling of cowboy wagons in a Western. In the montage one of the characters comes equipped with a rope to hog-tie the Black “victim.” All are “fixed” in the car's headlights – no second thoughts, guns drawn, in a laying down of bets, a showdown from the origins of America. Here, if Lyotard cared to look, is the site of his *Just Gaming* – not a site of incommensurable discourse, but of the trashing of the Other – a trashing that is done via the cars who “own” part of the “oil pan” body that is being aggressed.⁷²

This is the slaughter site of America that castrates the stranger, the immigrant, above all the Black. Lyotard turns to the “operating” scene

72 Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

in the middle of the collage where the "victim's" body is lynched, held down in a crucifix position by two other "gamers," guarded by an additional two playing shotgun and finally, in the centre, the last figure, operating on the penis of the immobilized "N-I-G-G-E-R" (the word floating in the oil pan body). Or maybe for the European audience the word becomes "JEW" with the KKK figures replaced by SS figures.

Here is no Black man but a collage centred on an oil pan, yet, of course, it is undoubtedly every Black man. Men assembled from car parts creating android, virtual men lubricated with black oil, machinic sites for the medical, surgical strike of racism. Just as for Lyotard there are no White men but every White man in the libidinal scene that attempts to circumscribe the metal black/tige/penis that threatens the sex of white women.

This feeding frenzy is part of America's melting pot that consumes penises, that dismounts the sexual, which creates the fear of rape that occurs every day. It is the operation of fear, the production of terror as Lyotard says – the terror of racism.

But Lyotard forgets he is in America. He forgets that the Kienholz's montage is a poker game played as much by the cars as the KKK figures. The game is with the Cadillac, the pickup truck, the Corvair, the Ford, and the Chevy – all of America is there. The event is every bit the creation of the cars of American culture as much as the clown face masks, coming from the Hollywood Magic Shop, worn by the recycled KKK clan members but signalling the American entertainment industry as accomplice. Or the mask on the Black "victim" rescued from a First World War training kit depicting those exposed to poisonous gas. Capitalism in the old form of the relations of the economy and war has not left the scene.

But it is even more than this with America becoming the foremost site of gambling. This is a Caesar's palace with the cars doing the gaming. Or maybe, the gaming is the original five-card stud invented by the soldiers in the American Civil War, which lives on in the continued uncivil race warring that characterizes America today.

America is a giant bet on the future, virtual outcomes of aleatory violence. Each day there are millions of little bets, with a million little ecstasies, a million little disassembled penises that play part of the poker game. The West, then, is not only a wall that marks the empire but also Caesar's Palace where the gaming, the wagers of Baudrillardian "last men" place their bets.

As a final irony it may be noted that Kienholz, who passed away in 1994 from a heart attack, was buried in the front seat of a 1940 Packard. Cars were there at the beginning, as one of Kienholz's first works was *Back Seat Dodge '38*, done in 1964. This work was at the time, just like *Five Car Stud*, deemed by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors



Figure 37. Edward Kienholz, *Back Seat Dodge '38*, 1964. © Estate of Nancy Reddin Kienholz. Courtesy of LA Louver, Venice, CA. The Digital Image. Museum Associates/LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY.

as “pornographic” as it depicted two people making out.⁷³ In the Packard with Kienholz were his dog’s ashes, a bottle of wine and naturally – a pack of cards! As for Lyotard, he will end his days in 1998 in a contest with Augustine trying to load the dice in his favour.⁷⁴

FOLD 2: COUNTER-GRADIENT

Autopsy of the Future: Nadia Myre’s *Indian Act* & *The Scar Project*

What could be more a more lucid autopsy of the future than the convergence of the artistic vision of Edward Kienholz and the theoretical imagination of Jean-François Lyotard. Their combinatorial is replete

73 Edward Kienholz, *Back Seat Dodge '38*. LACMA archives, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/246772>. When the work finally was displayed the car door remained closed and was opened only by request by individuals eighteen years of age or older.

74 See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine*, trans. Richard Beardsworth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) This last manuscript was published posthumously and may be read as Lyotard’s confession as much as the Saint’s.

with grim meaning and dark foreboding. The story of *Five Card Stud* with its brutal violence, fears of sexual miscegenation, white power triumphant, and street scenes of racial predation are played out everywhere now and, most noticeably, not in darkness any longer but in delirious scenes of racialized violence under bright lights, and all this energized by the libidinal energy of howling crowds on the hunt for vulnerable scapegoats. Here, contemporary styles of fascism, what the novelist Henry Miller has described as the “air-conditioned nightmare,”⁷⁵ discards its nostalgic mythology – esoteric symbols, uniform uniforms, messianic rhetoric – becoming something purely predatory, intensely libidinal, with its energy crowdsourced and its violence against bodies of colour seemingly orchestrated for spectacular effect – libidinal flows of hatred, rage and fear by shootings, stabbings, mutilations.

But every gradient has its counter-gradient. Consequently, if the violent libidinal flows of *Five Card Stud* fully reveal psychic discharges animating the public scene, the visual imagination of Nadia Myre, an Algonquin member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, does precisely the opposite, namely by creating a powerful artistic counter-gradient which reveals and resists the powers and dominations of racialized violence. And why not? Something like *Five Card Stud* has always been the game of white settler colonialism played against racialized bodies. It is a theatre of violence energized by flows of power, sex, malice. But, of course, for Indigenous bodies this flow of racialized violence has already occurred and continues to happen on a cosmological scale, with the mass genocide of Indigenous bodies – flesh, culture, and memory – the primal act of sacrificial violence at the heart of white settler colonialism. Consequently, for the Indigenous artistic imagination, the catastrophe has already happened, thus pushing their artistic productions to the postcataclysmic. The game is seemingly over with a stacked deck and a crook for a dealer at the table, with white winners of all that there is to win, self-forgiving and eager for (symbolic) reconciliation, leaving the subjects of racialized violence living in the time and space of post-catastrophe, looking for pathways to resurgence that are recovery (of memory, identity, belonging, community) and a politics of resistance. Here, vision is everything, and that is precisely what the art of Nadia Myre contributes. For example, her production of *Indian Act* (which

75 Henry Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (New York: New Directions, 1970).

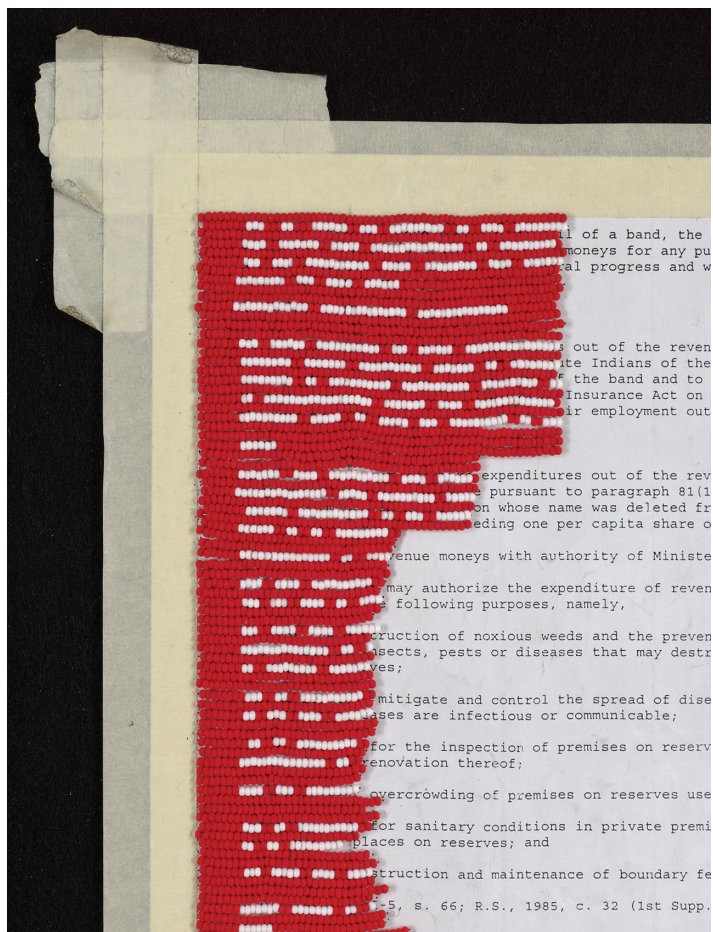


Figure 38. Nadia Myre, *Indian Act*. Courtesy of the artist.

reduced Indigenous people to wards of the Crown) was as brilliant in its conception as it was resurgent in its aesthetic composition. Taking Indigenous beads as her medium of choice, Myre proceeded to efface the print text of the legislation with strand after strand of magnificent beads. Like particles in fast motion brushing aside everything that stands in their way, the beads rise into visibility under two aesthetic signs: a sure and certain sign of the disappearance of the textual authority of the Indian Act by the power of Indigenous resurgence;

but also, the strings of beads as definite signs of the recovery of Indigenous cultural memory – Indigenous metonymy cutting right straight across the metaphorical (textual) screen of the colonial imaginary. Here questions of personal identity, communal solidarity, and insurgencies of resistance form an entirely new form of string theory, not in subatomic particle physics but in the living physics of Indigenous struggle against an unjust legislative violence.

It's the very same with Nadia Myre's *The Scar Project*. Always thinking collaboratively, always acting as an Indigenous artist in active solidarity, *The Scar Project* is deeply inspiring. As Emily Falvey eloquently describes it in *Canadian Art*:

Aesthetically, A scar is a paradox. An index of survival, it also marks the site of an indelible trauma. At once an emblem of violence and healing, fragility and strength, it says a lot while also saying very little. It may even be invisible, ghosting the psyche with its contradictions, at once a bottomless pit of sorrow and a potential wellspring of action.

The Scar Project is the fruit of a long-term, communal undertaking in which visitors were invited to sew their physical, emotional or spiritual scars onto a 10-inch square of raw canvas, while also putting the story of these injuries into words. Part studio-laboratory, part pop-up community-support group, *The Scar Project* travelled extensively in North America, occupying a variety of venues, including artist-run centres, galleries, cultural centres, retirement homes, schools and museums. Initially borne of Myre's desire to explore her personal scars, it soon came to reflect her abiding interest in sharing, collective healing and spiritual resilience. When the project concluded in 2013, she had amassed a collection of some 1,400 canvases and narratives chronicling the pain and injuries of a wide range of individuals, including her parents, her son and herself.

Typically displayed as an installation, whose ever-changing constellation recalls both formalist and post-Minimalist artistic strategies, the canvases of *The Scar Project* are at once incredibly diverse and ritualistically the same. Although many begin with the same repeated act – slashing and then suturing a gash in the canvas – each piece is unique, with styles and techniques ranging from abstract to representational, minimalist to collage. As an installation, *The Scar Project* feels both objective and incredibly personal, uniting the repetition of conceptual and process painting strategies with those of traditional craft practices. In their number and anonymity, the scarred canvases and their stories ultimately represent a collective wound. And while this wound is



Figure 39. Nadia Myre, *The Scar Project*. Courtesy of the artist.

necessarily universal – we all suffer, we all have scars – it is also very specific.⁷⁶

And perhaps something else as well. Maybe *The Scar Project* can attract such intense communal involvement because of its collective release of long-suppressed libidinal energy. Not this time directed to the nihilistic scene of sacrificial violence that is *Five Card Stud*, but *The Scar Project*, in the simplicity of its profundity, as motivating libidinal flows of pain, hurt, and trauma but also healing. And what could be a better aesthetic counter-gradient to these increasingly dark times than that?

⁷⁶ Emily Falvey, “Nadia Myre Fuses the Personal and the Political,” *Canadian Art*, 11 November 2015, <https://canadianart.ca/features/nadia-myre-fuses-the-personal-and-the-political/>.

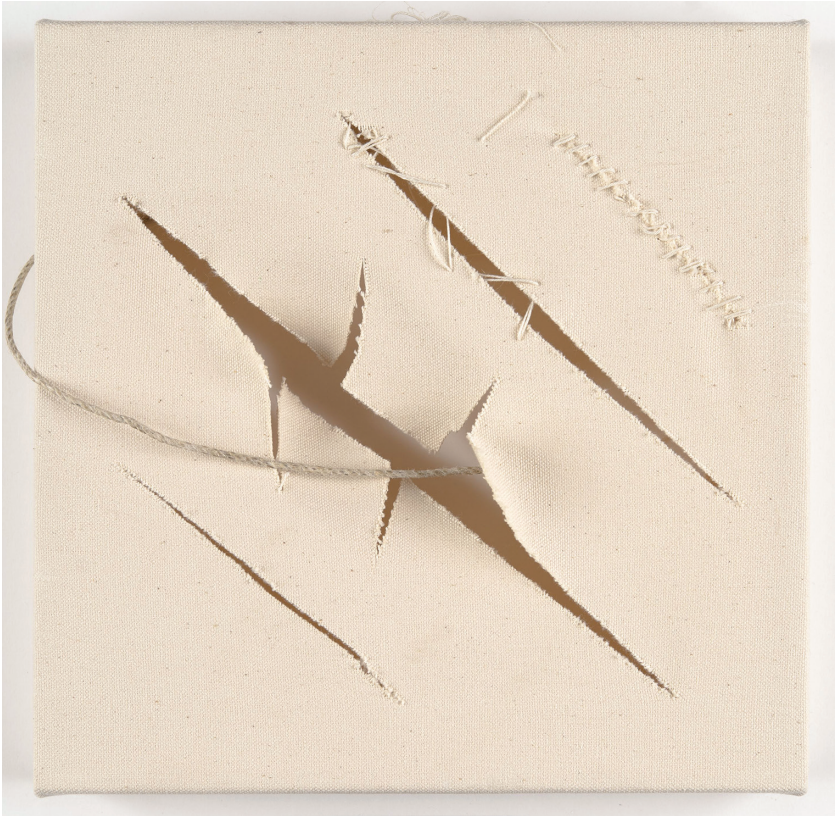


Figure 40. Nadia Myre, *The Scar Project*. Courtesy of the artist.

FOLD 3: FROM THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

From the Slaughterhouses to the Butchers to the Tate: Deleuze/Bacon

Imagine Francis Bacon, before he became a celebrated painter, in Paris on one of his sojourns; for example, in 1927–8 when he lived there for the better part of a year. He would not meet Gilles Deleuze then;

that would only happen many years later,⁷⁷ after Deleuze published his *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.⁷⁸ But Bacon may have been attracted to the slaughterhouses in Paris, at La Villette or, maybe, it was an earlier attraction to the butcher shops on the High Street back in London. Either way, from slaughterhouses to butcher and betting shops, from interior designer to painter and finally to the Galleries: the Tate and MoMA and many others.⁷⁹ This is Bacon's Deleuzean line of flight, as it were, that, in the end, will liquidate itself in the guttering out of a butchered self. A line of flight that will also turn out to be that of Deleuze's thought itself.

The slaughterhouses at La Villette are gone now. The tooth and claw turned into the peaceable kingdom – into a park whose design was helped, though without a trace, by none other than Jacques Derrida. Here we find a futuristic apartment complex, a form of clonal living likened to a new stockyard for people, along with a museum/amusement park to science. Maybe a type of ironic tribute to the older Francis Bacon whose science has its afterlife in the younger Bacon's work as we shall see. And, yes, there exists a small display of the old stockyards – less we forget.

Let us go back though, to one of the paintings that would launch Bacon's career, entitled, simply enough, *Painting 1946*.⁸⁰ Picture a meat locker with the butchered carcass hanging over one of Bacon's iconic black umbrellas all set above a scowling figure. Below, surrounding the figure's waist, are cuts of meat framed in type of geometric cage, a post-Euclidean geometry as we will see becoming Bacon's X-ray vision. As

77 The meeting was held after the publication of Deleuze's work that seemed to please Bacon. However, reports are that the dinner went badly for reasons that are probably owing to their personalities and not their respective works. See François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 448.

78 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, 2 vol. (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1981). Translations from this work are our own. There is an English translation of volume one: *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London: Continuum, 2003).

79 The works of Francis Bacon can be found at <http://www.francis-bacon.com/artworks/paintings>. The site is the official website of the estate of Francis Bacon. Paintings are sorted by decades of Bacon's active life as a painter. Reproductions of Bacon's works can also be found in volume 2 of Gilles Deleuze, *Logique de la Sensation* which is available only in the original French publication. A complete edition of the paintings can be found in Francis Bacon, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Martin Harrison (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2016).

80 Francis Bacon, *Painting 1946* © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, SOCAN and DACS/Artimage 2022. Photo credit: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.



Figure 41. Francis Bacon, *Painting* 1946. Credit: The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022. Photo credit: Prudence Cumming Associates Ltd.

well, naturally, we find a crucifixion scene that will be repeated many times by Bacon. This is the slaughterhouse art of an Otto Dix turned hysterical, becoming animal/becoming human, as Deleuze will have it, trying to wipe the horizon clean as Nietzsche would have it. Here with haunting gruesomeness, Bacon begins his liquidation of the flesh in the butchered self whose energy, whose sensation, will end in a painting of a society that has imploded into so many black holes.

Start, then, with Bacon in front of the canvas. A canvas that at first sight appears as a “white, virginal surface”⁸¹ reminiscent of the clean slate of Locke and his Enlightenment successors.⁸² But it turns out not so clean, after all, as the topological space is never so innocent (not even Bacon’s *Innocent X*, the recycled Velázquez portrait of the Pope, escapes the Baconian howl). In fact, the canvas is teaming with “all types of clichés”⁸³ which will initiate Bacon’s line of flight.

It is precisely this cliché-ridden field that organizes the space of Western painting prior to Bacon in Deleuze’s view. This is a space that found its coordinates in a Cartesian plane that is without colour, without life – a space that is, in its essence, only an optical space, a representational space. This is the space of modern thought and painting. Yet through Bacon’s eye this space is teeming with the virtual remains of the social, a space of a Roland Barthes’s image-repertoire. It is this space that Bacon breaks with, he literally tries to rub it out, to wipe it clean, and then to paint over this chaotic space. From this space comes the catastrophe that emerges from the painting itself that breaks with the given.⁸⁴ It is this catastrophe that becomes Bacon’s art. Bacon works the edges of catastrophes deforming them into a new science of painting. According to Deleuze:

Chaos and catastrophe, it is the collapse of all the figurative givens, it is then already a struggle, a struggle against the cliché, preparatory work (all the more necessary as we are no longer “innocent”). And it is chaos that

81 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 14.

82 Deleuze refers to this as “a haptic space [l’espace haptique] that rivals optic space.” Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 85.

83 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 14.

84 It might be argued that Francis Bacon the elder (1561–1626) was a precursor to Locke, theorizing a separation of the subject and object favouring the latter. Whereas Bacon the painter, to use Deleuze’s phrase, takes the older Bacon from behind to privilege sense experience or at least sensation. See the comments on the older Bacon and John Locke in Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (Toronto: Academic Press, 1981), 13.

leaves first the “pigheaded (têtue) geometry” the “geological lines”; and this geometry or geology that must in its way pass by catastrophe, in order to raise its colors, in order for the earth to rise towards the sun.⁸⁵

So not the virginal field or the ordered field but a Deleuzian and Guattarian chaosmose oozing from the gargantuan memory file of the socially trivial, the banal, the worn out, the cliché. The line of flight is to drain oneself the better to fall/rise/mount (to) the sun as Bacon has it. But not to the sun of either the resplendent field of Ezekiel’s chariot gleaming in the sun nor Locke’s brilliant gold guinea but more a Bataille solar anus where the light disappears in the many holes of the earth – an earth that rises to swallow the sun in the many Baconian mouths. And here with these multiple little black holes we will see a bit later a new figure, a Deleuze/Bacon figure of the social, emerge.

For the moment, back to the butcher shop to redo the pig headed, not as the stubborn and obstinate linear space of representational optics, but to the cutting edge of space itself. Bacon, the butcher, goes to work with his instruments: the rag, the sponge, the brush. All are in the aid of stripping bare the figural, even. Bacon turns art into the rag and bone business where the rags annihilate the cliché-ridden portrait reducing it to the bone. The effacement of the figure creates the virtual landscape where the body is eviscerated and, in the language of Deleuze, loses its organs to the butcher’s knife/brush. The tableau passes from a representational state to a virtual state thereby freeing, in turn, the organs to be displayed as meat. Even the eye, the centre of the visual world, turns from the gaze that fixed the aesthetic object, that created the artist, to a more primitive and deformed solar anus. The eye deforms itself into the primitive stem that originates life – mutating the figure into energy itself, into pure presence.⁸⁶

Back as well to the science of Bacon’s namesake. A new topology of the catastrophe emerges in the surfacing and diagramming of the geometric forms. This gives rise to the circles, parallelepipeds, cubes, ovals, squares, or the general field geometry that emerges for Bacon from the canvas itself. These zones are topologies of the virtual, not as cliché, but of the virtual as the geometry of the indeterminate. A virtual self results

85 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 73.

86 “Liberating the lines and colors of representation, one liberates at the same time the eye from its belonging to the organs, one liberates it from its character as a fixed and qualified organ: the eye becomes virtually the indeterminate, polyvalent organ, that sees the body without organs, this is the Figure, as pure presence.” Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 36.



Figure 42. Francis Bacon, *Crucifixion*, 1965 (Centre Panel of the triptych) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, SOCAN and DACS/ Artimage 2022. Photo credit: Hugo Maertens.

from the process of these deformations where the successive energy waves act to erase the figural as representative. Here are zones, as well, of the natural, of the deformation of the human/animal reduced to its raw state. They become Deleuzean for Deleuze. "The painting of Bacon constitutes ... a zone of *indiscernibility*, of *undecidability* between man and animal."⁸⁷ This will be on the way to new worlds of half-flesh/half-metal so brilliantly depicted by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker.

Thus, Bacon's canvases are event zones of various levels of sensation. They are not a set of givens but rather what come as a chromatic space of spectral variations. Variable amplitude waves pass through the zones meeting the forces of the energy field that, in this "patascience," (to use Alfred Jarry's term) give rise to sensations. Bacon, then, is the painter of the energy field of the nervous system. He acts as the inciter for the synaptic jump – an oscillator that uses the sensations as an X-ray machine.⁸⁸ One might say that Bacon becomes the first image-resonating machine. His X-rays act as sensations that deform the body as they change energy levels. "This is why sensation is the master of deformations, the agent of deformations of the body."⁸⁹

For Deleuze, Bacon becomes a painter who is hard wired to the circuitry of the sensations. However, Deleuze stops short of seeing that Bacon is giving a continuous read out of the hysterical culture that lurches about in a spasmodic set of convulsions. The self, constantly vacating into the drain pipes, toilets, and umbrellas, is a register of the forces of the spectral existence of the quantum postmodern. The self becomes the site of deformations that erase the self, that turn it into a raw nerve that becomes the butchered self.

Take another example from Bacon, the crucifixion triptych, such as *Crucifixion*, 1965,⁹⁰ where the flesh mutates until it literally flows from the bones leaving the armature, the cross, the skeletal self – becoming in the final frame of the triptych a side of beef hanging from its hook. Again Deleuze: "It is only at the butchers that Bacon is a religious painter."⁹¹ Here one might see the final sequel to Michel Foucault's *Confessions of the Flesh* in becoming the animal for the last festive dinner before the

87 Italics are in the original. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 20.

88 See Francis Bacon's comments in David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 31–2, where he notes the influence of X-rays on his work.

89 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 28.

90 Francis Bacon, *Crucifixion*, 1965 (Centre panel) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, SOCAN and DACS/Artimage 2022. Photo credit: Hugo Maertens.

91 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 21.

arrival of the messiah. Just as *Pope NO. 2* (1960) is pictured with the butchered chest caught in the virtual field of his throne.

Religion embodied not in the church, mosque, or synagogue but in the slaughterhouse wherein live the Pope and his crucifixions.

This operational theatre, performed by Bacon on the self, renders the self hysterical.⁹² The self howls and screams, becoming the vacated presence of itself, suffers its own catastrophe much like animals at slaughter sense their impending fate. Hence, the famous Bacon cries (no smiles) found from the series of popes and in his earlier *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944).⁹³ Again, picture the Baconian triptych painted on a vibrant orange canvas striated by geometric lines of force where three wasted, emaciated figures, monsters as Deleuze calls them or furies according to Bacon, who confront the viewer. Two of the figures have elongated necks ending in an open gaping mouth. Each panel a type of reprocessed Edvard Munch *Scream*⁹⁴ or, as Bacon suggests, a bit of Eisenstein's nurse from *The Battleship Potemkin*,⁹⁵ that becomes the Baconian snarl – neither human nor animal. And even less remains in Bacon's 1988 reprise of the earlier painting where the orange has turned to blood red of the butcher's shop. Here the canvas has grown to twice the size with no redemption, no saviour in sight.

But even this fate may be clichéd and banal and, for Deleuze, signals the turn of Bacon towards a Deleuzian philosophy of a more desperate line of flight – the escape line, the vector that will send all into the black hole of the Baconian world.

The current formula, “to pass through a mouse hole,” renders banal even the abominable or fate. Hysterical scene. All of the series of spasms with Bacon is of this type, love, vomit, excrement, always the body that tries to escape *by* one of its organs, to rejoin the surface (l'aplat), the material structure.⁹⁶

92 “Of all the arts, painting is without a doubt the only one that integrates of necessity, ‘hysterically’, its own catastrophe, and constitutes itself from that as a ‘forward’ flight.” Deleuze turns this hysterical catastrophe into an escape strategy as he does with all blockages. However, this is more Deleuze than Bacon. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 67.

93 Francis Bacon, *Fury*, c. 1944 © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, SOCAN and DACS/Artimage 2022. Photo credit: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd.

94 For a reproduction of one version of Edvard Munch's *The Scream* see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edvard_Munch.

95 A reproduced still of Sergei Eisenstein's screaming nurse may be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon_\(artist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Bacon_(artist)). It would seem appropriate to Bacon's own collection of screaming figures that the Eisenstein film was a silent movie.

96 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 17.



Figure 43. Francis Bacon, *Fury*, c. 1944.

The deformed body tries each element of the virtual field to find the wormhole that will allow it out. The virtual toilets and drains of *Triptych*, May–June 1973, the mirrors of the *Portrait of George Dyer Staring into a Mirror* (1967 and again in 1968), or the satanic umbrellas of the butcher store in *Painting 1946* referred to earlier, each a virtual escape route going back/forward into the gutter. Each case is a liquidating the self, torturing the self, amputating the self. Thus, we have the self-mutilations in *Triptych–August* 1972 where the serial progress of the figure of the self (first frame) is then joined by another becoming a couple (second frame) to end (in the third frame) with the self and its prostheses. All gained in the experience of life forming what is in essence a social critique. As Deleuze says: “a curious race for the handicap.”⁹⁷

But the Baconesque self has nowhere to go. Its hysterical presence produces the body in spasm. The nervous system is turned up to full volume emitting for Bacon the spectrum of colours and sensations that constitute life. But, unlike Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*,⁹⁸ there is no antinarrative that avoids the stasis of the virtual blackness of the toilets, drains, mirrors, and umbrellas. The schizoid self becomes deformed into the spasmodic, prosthetic self syringed to its chair in *Lying Figure with Hypodermic Syringe* (1963), or like the paralytic child/animal prostrated on the circle watching the woman liquidate the bowl in *After Muybridge* (1965).

But, maybe, again, it is back to “just gaming.” Not the gaming of Jean-François Lyotard nor of Edward Kienholtz’s *Five Card Stud* but rather back to the early Bacon and the betting shop that he ran to garner a meagre income when he was young. Here, as Deleuze points out: “For Bacon it is a question of roulette; and he plays at several tables at the same time, for example, three tables, exactly like he finds himself in front of the three panels of a triptych.”⁹⁹

This is indeed a game of chance but played out in the Deleuzian and Guattarian chaomose, not governed by a universe of probabilities but of virtualities. Bacon is much closer to the Nietzschean/Mallarméan roll of the dice. This is not a Pascalian wager for the Bacon house is bankrupt. Rather it is the playing-out of the Deleuzian differences under the dark precursor with the Nietzschean spider descending into an actuality of an energy/sensation fieldscape. Witness the late Bacon’s

97 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 30.

98 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

99 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 61.

technique of throwing paint at the canvas, a type of roulette, a type of paintballing that may, after all, only be another energy wave whose amplitude brings forth sensation – like his *Jet of Water* (1979).¹⁰⁰ One might also imagine it as a cosmic flow that ultimately vanishes in the night skies however sunny and bright the canvas appears.

Bacon's virtual topology as we have seen, invested as it is with the cliché-ridden banalities of everyday life, gives rise to the sensationalist violence of serial culture. This becomes the violence of the nervous system itself. This is no longer an electrified McLuhan mediascape but rather an event-scene of disappearing virtual particles. The nervous system is a network of indeterminacy, of chaos theory. Thus, the game is only a version of the catastrophe of Baconian life that comes about with the effacement of the self. It is the accident that lies in the virtual space of the painting that plays itself out in the roulette wheel telling Bacon the number. It is the deformation of the self that creates the new self, or at least according to Deleuze, "As the song says, *I'm changing my shape, I feel like an accident.*"¹⁰¹

It is in the catastrophic accident that these Baconian lines of flight end. The desiring machines have nothing left to desire in the Bacon/Deleuze world. The assemblages are no longer schizoid but are the remains, the figures at the base of the crucifixion of 1944 – a type of horror with body parts strewn over the field. This is, ironically, captured in the 1987 horror comedy film *Slaughterhouse* featuring, again ironically enough, two Bacons as central characters. The film is also known as *Maniac* and *Bacon Bits*.¹⁰²

This is the self that has been liquidated by the guttering out, leaving nothing but a sensation – a spasmodic synaptic gap, a nervous twitch. Do not the many chairs and stools of the Baconian world become a series of electric chairs with the last remains of sensation being the crucifixion in a world with only howling popes? Or is it a Baconian becoming, a Deleuzean becoming posthuman, a desperate defibrillator to reenact/reemerge the Frankenstein body? Enter a post-Deleuzean world where new creatures will emerge moving again from the butchered self to find their place in another futuristic park, in another gallery.

100 The Francis Bacon website shows the *Jet of Water* as completed in 1988 rather than 1979 though given Deleuze's work was published in 1981, the earlier date would seem to be appropriate.

101 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 101. The italicized part is in English in the original.

102 Rick Roessler, dir., *Slaughterhouse* (LA: Manson International Pictures, 1987). The third title of the film is the *Pig Farm Massacre*. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slaughterhouse_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slaughterhouse_(film)).

FOLD 3: COUNTER-GRADIENT

Wolf Girl: Kiki Smith and the Butchered Self

Wolf Girl

But what if it is just the opposite? Not so much the butchered self of Francis Bacon but something more enigmatic, fluid, and indecipherable. For example, consider the artistic imagination of Kiki Smith which implicitly challenges reducing the fate of the body to the slaughterhouse and virtualizing perspective into the geometry of X-ray vision. Not that Kiki Smith is not interested in slaughterhouses. In fact, one of her recent



Figure 44. Kiki Smith, *Wolf Girl*. Pace Gallery. With permission of the artist.



Figure 45. Kiki Smith, *Siren* (a detail from *Memory*). Deste Foundation. With permission of the artist.

productions, *Memory*, was intentionally constructed on the site of a former slaughterhouse on the Greek island of Hydra.

Except, in this artistic encounter, memories of the slaughterhouse with its terror of the abattoir and the visceral smell of butchered animals are overridden, and thus effectively undone, by other memories – mythological this time. Here, memories of the slaughterhouse rise to the (screaming) sky under the sign of sacrificial violence and are complicated by other memories – astrology, water, mythology, fantasy, magic, site-specific material histories. As Cory Reynolds writes in the preamble to the documentation of the exhibition, *Memory*:

For Smith, the body and its symmetry are always close at hand, and never in a state of stasis," Maggie Wright writes. "Physical forms have the ability to morph, mutate, dissolve. Smith has often noted the autobiographical

nature of her work, and it is hard not to recognize the female experience at the core of metamorphosis: the initial transformation from girlhood to womanhood is fraught and powerful. In Smith's art, however, change expands to nurture a variety of forms. Humans turn to animals, animals to other animals; new beings are collaged from each. Bronze oxidizes, candles melt, flags inflate and flutter, and sunlight reemerges daily.

Stories, too, are continually reshaped: Greek myths and pagan rituals have been absorbed into the religious stories and sacraments of Christianity, plays and poems are recited to new audiences. Fairy tales and parables evolve for the next generation: a poisoned princess no longer passively sleeps, she actively dreams. Back in Hydra's Historical Archives – Museum of Hydra, where remnants of the past await the gaze of the present, an island's history is told and retold. Its collective memories, stories and traditions are like boats in the blue sea, helping to navigate increasingly choppy water. Over all, the Hydra snake – monster or scapegoat, healer and healed – watches from the heavens.¹⁰³

When sacrificial violence meets the aesthetic imagination, the result is beautiful entanglement. Not the body on a one-way street to the butchered self, but the body enigmatic, twisting, uncertain, hybrid. Like Kiki Smith's *Wolf Girl*, in which Little Red Riding Hood is not eaten by the wolf in this visual retelling of the story, but actually absorbs the energetics of the wolf-spirit into herself – wild, fierce, furry, out for a prowl on the night of the full moon. And certainly not only bodies with violated nervous systems, but something definitely more complex, and, in that complexity, mysterious and ultimately unknowable. That's Kiki Smith's *Born*, where women are birthed by animals – vulnerable, powerful, with bodily metamorphosis in full view; and *My Blue Lake* with its blue the classic psychoanalytic hue of melancholia and the image itself a haunting triptych of three heads in one, perhaps the eternal trinity of emotion, will, and intelligence but maybe something very different, namely melancholy possessing all the liquidity of the lake that is a woman's self-healing – filled with spirits of the wild, the demands of the day, and dreamy hopes for the future with nothing ever certain, with the body always waging sacrificial violence against itself, with life itself an always stressful canticle of entanglement.

But, if that's the case, the fate of a woman's body through the magical vision of Kiki Smith is nothing that can ever be X-rayed, definitely

103 Nadja Argryopoulou and Maggie Wright, *Kiki Smith: Memory* (Athens, Greece: Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, 2022), <https://www.artbook.com/9786185039370.html>.



Figure 46. Kiki Smith, *My Blue Lake*, Pace Gallery. With permission of the artist.



Figure 47. Kiki Smith, *Born*, 2002. Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Sarah Norton Goodyear Fund, 2002 (2002:2). Photo credit: Tom Loonan for Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Albright-Knox Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY. © Kiki Smith. With permission of the artist.

nothing that can be reduced to geometric perspective. After all, we are talking about vibrant bodies here, bodies that have all the stubbornness, facticity, and enigmatic qualities of the human predicament itself. Looking from the side of power, Francis Bacon may have so powerfully captured the force field of screaming mouths, tortured bodies, slaughterhouse flesh, and infinities of violated nerves, but Kiki Smith, looking this time from the perspective of women's bodies in the world, has captured something very different, as simple in its gesture and it is complicated in its consequences. Not the blood of the slaughterhouse, but Smith's *Body Trailing Blood* with its sliding signifiers of the rising moon of fertility and mythic cycles of discharges of bodily waste. In *Body Trailing Blood*, there are no infinities of violence, only the beautiful finitude of a woman's presence in the world; certainly no data meat, only the singularity of a vulnerable woman's body.

But that, of course, is the generative power of entanglement in quantum society. Bringing Kiki Smith and Francis Bacon into conversation reveals the hidden fault lines of a fold in the fabric of reality where the multiplicity of bodily experience is fully revealed – the butchered self once intensified by technology mutating into data meat; trajectories of virtuality brought up short by the bodily enigmas of *Born* and *My Blue Lake*; the wildness of *Wolf Girl* morphing into the bodily finitude that is *Body Trailing Blood*. Curiously enough, in the way of all intensive artistic encounters with bodily sensation, Bacon and Smith are not actually that far apart. Kiki Smith might dwell on the morphing of animals and humans, but so does Bacon with his *Three Studies for the Crucifixion*, 1962, “where the flesh mutates until it literally flows from the bones becoming the armature, the cross, the skeletal self – becoming in the final frame of the triptych a side of beef hanging from its hook.”¹⁰⁴ And, if Smith focuses on deformations of bodily sensation – becoming wolf-spirit in *Wolf Girl*, intensifying melancholy in *My Blue Lake* – Bacon has already been there. First, by making of the body what Deleuze describes as a “zone of indiscernibility, of undecidability between man and animal” and, subsequently, by painting the body as an event zone of bodily sensation with the nervous system itself as an energy field. Here, the artistic imagination uses sensations to probe the body, like an X-ray machine that deforms the body as it changes energy levels. With Kiki Smith and Francis Bacon, what is really brought into visibility is that most intensive of aesthetic moments – two folds of bodily sensation

104 See the haunting images of the butchered self of Francis Bacon in the previous essay, “From the Slaughterhouses to the Butcher to the Tate: Deleuze/Bacon.”



Figure 48. Kiki Smith, *Body Trailing Blood*. With permission of the artist.

beautifully entangled. Francis Bacon may have painted the nervous system of the “body without organs” – indeterminate, undecidable, rising to the sun of the virtual – but Kiki Smith does him one better. Working in the embodied language of the figural – leaking, bleeding women’s bodies – she paints, sculpts, and draws *organs without a body*, organs in pursuit of bodily shapes that are themselves always indeterminate, undecidable, mutating, morphing – bodies no sooner born than suddenly a body trailing blood, a blue lake, a wolf-girl, a memory.

FOLD 4: THE QUANTUM CITIZEN

TRANS/formers: More than Meets the Eye Duchamp/Lyotard

It may be that the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard himself became unhinged when looking at Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*. Certainly, retrospectively, it struck up the libidinal band creating – even – (for Lyotard) a trans/formation from the left-wing socialist to the post-modern. But all of that is life, seen, perhaps, through rose-coloured glasses – to parody Duchamp.

Lyotard in the mid-1970s undertook a study of Duchamp which resulted in a number of presentations and commentaries on his work collected in his *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*. In fact, Lyotard, over the course of his career, would take up a number of artists ranging from Paul Cézanne and Paul Klee in his earlier *Discourse, Figure*, to later discussions of Jacques Monory and the Americans Edward Kienholz and Sam Francis, among others. Much of the analysis in these cases concerns the nature of the aesthetic, a concern which is still present in Lyotard's later study of Kant.¹⁰⁵ However, here the focus of this reflection will be on the social and political aspects of the virtual as it emerges from the encounter of Lyotard with Mademoiselle Sélavy and Monsieur Marcel.

Let us begin with what is the standard fare in Western public education: the study of Euclid's geometry. Recall the setting is homogenous space and time wherein one finds axioms and propositions such as the nature of this three-dimensional space, the point, the line, and other axioms governing angles and the congruence of triangles. Especially, the concept of congruence and the related concept of commensurability became for Lyotard a type of *bête noire* depicting what is wrong with theories based on Euclid. Elsewhere, this is primarily worked out in his writings on language and the incommensurable nature of phrases, though a call for narratives would emerge from Lyotard's consideration of Plato in the Duchamp essays.

Let us also begin with the critique of politics that emerges in the Euclidean universe. Lyotard asserts that, along with homogenous space and time, democracy also presumed each individual, as a citizen, was also homogenous and isomorphic – a version of one vote per person. That is, democratic government depends on the indiscernible nature of the participants symmetrical under the law. But these very citizens one knows are divided, as Lyotard earlier suggests, into classes that under capitalism are not superimposable. As we can see below in his analysis of Duchamp, nor are the bride and bachelor, the male and female. So much for the equality of the citizenry.

You know that the democratic principle and its constitutional implementation, of whatever variety, is indissociable from a representative space and

105 See Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also, Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Lyotard locates the aesthetic in the modern period that is transformed in the postmodern to a new set of sensibilities which are overturned by technology and science, as evidenced by Duchamp.

sizes in space such that this space, i.e., the space of politics, is assumed to be homogeneous and isomorphic in all its points, and that all sizes found in it are judged to be commensurable: it is in this foundation of Euclidean geometry that the idea of democratic equality rests, each citizen being, in such a hypothesis, indiscernible from any other.¹⁰⁶

Another way of expressing this is to ask whether the proposition of congruency, expressed analytically in Euclid's example of congruent triangles, continue to be so in the post-Euclidean geometry as we enter quantum space/time. To explore this question Lyotard turns to Duchamp whose interest in non-Euclidean space was well known and illustrated in his celebrated works *The Large Glass*, pictured below, and *Given*.¹⁰⁷ Here, we are introduced to the characters, the bride and bachelors who are presented in the two-dimensional art Euclidean world but who go and come from multidimensional spaces. This is how Lyotard describes Duchamp's *The Large Glass*:

The *Glass* is made up of two regions separated by bars of glass, the lower one being the region of the Bachelors, and the upper one the region of the Bride. The transversal lines that separate them are like the hinge (*the hinges*) of a mirror with two or three faces. The two virtual spaces of the top and bottom are in a relation of incongruence one with the other like the two gloves. Bride and Bachelors occupy similar and non-super-imposable spaces, unless you bring in a meta-operator (which would be four-dimensional).¹⁰⁸

The *Large Glass* sets in motion the machinic reflection of ego formation that produces the individual. It is a type of androgynous creation as a combination of the sexes that takes place in a virtual space. The *Glass* is a transformational machine taking, at each instant, the givens, and phase shifting this vector state towards the virtual. Thus, the machine works, not as a Euclidean operator, as we have seen, nor as the Freudian

106 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 27.

107 *The Large Glass* and *Given* may be found at WikiArt.

108 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 34–5. Lyotard continues the paragraph as follows which is in parentheses in the original. "(In reality the situation is a little more complicated: the figures of the top, pieces of the Bride, are not the projections of a three-dimensional object onto a plane, but the two-dimensional projections of the three-dimensional projections of a four-dimensional object; the meta-operator would have to be five-dimensional.)" Which is to say, that Lyotard sees Duchamp entering here into the *n* dimensional space of the quantum world.

operator. Duchamp's art is not the warring, three agents of the psyche – id, ego, and superego – nor does he collapse the self into Deleuze and Guattari's telescopic "mommy, daddy and me" being reduced to "me," but rather the self-supersedes the real in the higher dimensions of the virtual.

Here are then two virtual spaces named the "bachelors" and the "bride" to be "laid bare" in their essence for Lyotard as incommensurable spaces. This is a type of abandonment of sexuality that overtakes the libidinal in the exchange economy of fluid gender identities. The spaces never intersect for Lyotard for there is no seductive moment in the glass outside of the defunct reflection of the mirror stage. The triangles are not congruent nor is the space or the images.

Thus, we have the *Glass* as a trickster, a dissimulator that transforms the real into the virtual. "The surface of the mirror operates as a dissimulating mechanism, it metamorphoses the straight line into a point; more precisely, it splits linearity: it extracts a virtual punctuality from the straight line."¹⁰⁹ And so it will for everyday dimensions as the traditional three dimensions become four (or more) in Duchamp's flirtation with the physics of his day. And it is precisely in this gaming, for Lyotard, that one has the proliferation of the virtual, of spaces emerging out of the everyday spaces as virtual spaces. Thus, it is that the marriage is never consummated in the *Glass* any more than sex with its secretions has refounded the social on a blissful high.

The challenge for Lyotard is, if the political world rests on the three-dimensional, the reality it seeks to capture always engenders the higher dimensions of the virtual world. For it is only in the higher dimensions that the incongruent can again achieve congruence. Think, for example, the classic example of the mirror image of a hand that can only be brought back into congruency by another mirror.

Yet for Lyotard, no less than for Duchamp, this proves impossible. Lyotard's politics founders on the very incommensurate nature of representation. That is, the citizen cannot be represented through the democratic process for the representative is always, as one knows, forever condemned to misrepresent the citizen. Just as the bride and bachelors will remain entrapped in the two-dimensional space of the glass, the politics of democratic society remain fractured by multiple misunderstandings – witness the American congressional debates over the last decade. Here, the higher dimensional understandings of each citizen create a multiworld political landscape where the virtual world of each

109 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 90.



Figure 49. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Katherine S. Dreir, 1952-98-1.

bars the interchange of viewpoints. They are of different spaces, different planes that are hinged, to use Duchamp's word.¹¹⁰ It is not surprising, as a consequence, that realities are swayed by so-called fake news that has exited the commonsense world of shared discourse. Each individual in virtual space and no one in Euclidean space.

We then enter a strange post-Nietzschean perspectival world. Duchamp, for all his exploration of the virtual, cannot enter the virtual space through his art. Remaining always Nietzschean, the gaze fixes itself in perspectival space unable to find the Deleuzian thread that leads to the virtual. Here is how Lyotard presents it:

The effect produced is in principle that of the virtual three-dimensional, that of deep space dug out in the support by perspective. But as the support is made of transparent glass, the eye paradoxically *cannot* traverse it to explore the virtual space. When it traverses it, it encounters the "real" objects that are behind the *Glass*, for example the window of the exhibition room of the Philadelphia Museum. It is thrown back onto its own activity, without being able to lose itself in virtual objects, as the reality-effect would have it. A transformation of the perspectivist transformation.¹¹¹

The *Glass* presents the relationship of other as the resultant of the collapse of the multidimensional self, of the quantum (n) dimensions, always towards the self of dimensionality ($n-1$). The viewer, only and ever, sees the mirror in its collapsed state, but always and ever is drawn towards the transformer, the meta-operator, to Lyotard himself who will change the channels, the planes, the dimensions for the viewer.

Return again to the installations of the Duchamp artworks where the viewer comes to see the art through the window/hole that gives onto the art. Here the viewer is turned into the voyeur. Enter again the world of Bataille's story of the eye where the sexual parts of the bride are the lens through which the remains of the transgressive act are recorded.¹¹² Notably for Duchamp's *Glass*, the gaze never penetrates remaining

110 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 95. "Thus, the image of a 4-dimensional angle might be given, thinks Duchamp, by the cutting of two 3-dimensional continua, for example the intersection (at an obtuse angle) of two mirrors, this intersection representing that of two virtual spaces along a 'hinge-plane.'"

111 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 33–4.

112 See Georges Bataille, *The Story of the Eye* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987). "What you see from your door-holes is Mademoiselle Rose [*sic*], naked, hosing you with her waterfall; what you see in my inverted image is Monsieur Marcel, the man from the gas company. You'll say: But, but ... it's already Bataille's eye ... And all's well." Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 8. The ellipses are in the original.

always ahead of the act, always being returned to the real, to the object dimension of the mirror. All then becomes perspective that conflates the dimensions of the viewer.

Caught, then, in a strobe-like gaze that either is too soon or too late, the Lyotard/Duchamp transformer produces the alternating current of the binary. The *Glass* sends the viewer to the *Given* and in the interim, in the time of the passage – a passage without a passageway between the works of art – the event occurs. The actual event of the bride being laid bare is relegated to the virtual.

That is, the laying bare: before it, the body is hidden from gaze; after it, it is exposed to it. It is the instant of transformation or metamorphosis of this before into this after. It is graspable only at this limit. So: two “solutions”. That of the *Glass*, where the gaze comes always too soon, because the event is “late”, the *corpus* remaining to be stripped without end. With that of *Given*, it’s the gaze that arrives too late, the laying bare is finished, there remains the nudity. That goes without saying for any event, erotic, artistic, political.¹¹³

So, events escape the determinism of the causality for a time and space in another dimension – that of the quantum. Perhaps, the addition of electrical poles in *Cols alités* – or the gas or the waterfall – was what did it, joining the world of technology so aptly described by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker.¹¹⁴

Lyotard’s politics leaves democracy suspended in a regime that controls the senses, here with Duchamp, where the libidinal drives are short circuited into a before of the *Glass* and an after of the *Given*. This is, for Lyotard, the history of the Western tradition beginning with Plato’s cave. Chained forever in front of the images of the

113 Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, 198–9. A different Plato’s cave can be imagined by Lyotard. Thierry Chaput, the coordinator of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* in 1985, asked Lyotard, who was also co-organizing, to conceive of the space in the Beaubourg as a “labyrinth of thirty ‘zones,’ the vaporous darkness of Plato’s cave in the post-modern version.” The visitor enters the cave of the technological transformation of the senses. Hence, a new Plato’s cave for the quantum postmodern. See Pierre Restany comments in *Domus*, no. 662: (June 1985), 60–3. Also the comment is reproduced at Socks Studio: Fosco Lucarelli, “Les Immatériaux (an exhibition by Jean François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou, 1985,” Socks Studio, 16 July 2014, <https://socks-studio.com/2014/07/16/les-immateriaux-an-exhibition-of-jean-francois-lyotard-at-the-centre-pompidou-1985/>.

114 See Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *Technologies of the Real* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

two-dimensional space projected on the cave's wall, we are blissfully unaware of the virtual world outside of the cave. Always retuned to the senses and their control in the universe of perspective. This is the world of Euclidean certainties with fixed points of view and fixed origins. A static world which is no surprise in a world of permanent forms. The turn then to narratives emanating from those who return to the cave has, as is well known, a difficult fate. The reception of what appears to be a counterfactual vision engenders a violent reaction. Worst still is that the narratives need not upon return to be the same. Politics faced with this either moves to an authoritarian mode or splinters into competing visions which the cave dwellers reject, whether one is given a noble lie or, more likely, base lies in today's case. One might be excused if one speculated that a version of this seems to have animated the Trump White House.

But maybe Lyotard did not take Plato's analogy of the cave as our future, however much the case can be made that Plato's *Republic* speaks to us today.¹¹⁵ What if, following an early comment in his analysis of the senses in the Duchamp text, he embraced the idea that the senses, even under the abuse of capitalism, can alter the very proletarian workers who, rather than opening the door to tyranny, can change the situation – a vector transformation. Here Lyotard notes, the hum of the machines redefines the senses engendering the worker with an enhanced ability to process and function at high frequencies. The enhanced sound waves are likened to the quantum world where spin and velocity lead to a transformation of Euclidean geometry. The battle to control the senses mutates the high performance of capitalist production by a dimensional shift to the quantum culture of the singularity of the individual. Enter, then, the world described by the early Jacques Rancière's *Proletarian Nights, Staging the People*, where the creativity of the worker creates a new political aesthetic.¹¹⁶ The flourishing of multinarratives that Lyotard describes after the rejection of grand narratives may lead to the multipathways of the social media but can as well see unanticipated, undetermined coming together of individuals around issues that have a virtual

115 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 14. "Another example was given by a celebrated ear-specialist; of a worker whose auditory perception was hardly affected by the noise of the machine ... even though the frequency was of the order of 20,000 Hz. ... there is in the hardest working-class conditions an impressive contribution that easily matches, and perhaps exceeds, the adventures of poets, painters, musicians, mathematicians, physicists, and the boldest tinkerers and tamperers."

116 For a further lucid reflection on working-class creativity, see particularly Jacques Rancière's *Proletarian Nights, Staging the People*, trans. John Drury (New York: Verso, 2012).

presence in everyday activity. Witness not only the election of Mr. Trump but the surge around racial violence, and social media, pornography, or the revectoring of politics under the ecological operator.

In the end, Duchamp remained rooted in the hardness of physics and Lyotard preferred the hermeticism of “no exit” where the gaze never is fully reciprocal. But it is a world that more than meets the eye – for the art is a dissimulator and trickster. The best of all possible worlds may be playing the trick. “The trick is to use the specular and the reproductive, those mechanisms of assimilatory terror, to engender something dissimilar, to invent singularities.”¹¹⁷ It is the dissimilar that arises in the virtual and to the extent it generates singularities we are given a new definition of the citizen not as an isomorphic Euclidean actor to be represented in a congruency but rather the unique citizen, the quantum citizen, in a democracy that recognizes the transformational aspects of all political action – however nonlinear, chaotic, and unpredictable that may be.

FOLD 5: THE VORTEX OF IMMATERIAL BODIES

Alberto Giacometti and the Quantum Void

Imagine that you are a small particle about to be born in a sunburst. The mission you have been given is to visit earth and to help you an accompaniment of several billion fellow travellers will go with you. You are, of course, a neutrino and you will travel at the speed of light reaching your destination 150 million kilometres away in roughly eight minutes. You are free to change colour en route though until recently if you did so you might not be detected. So, one must keep an eye out for the gravitational wave that signals the earth mass. Well, we all know the outcome. To date only a handful of neutrinos have been located in the detectors buried in the earth. The rest sail right through unless they meet their fate encountering an antineutrino. This is the spatial world of Alberto Giacometti and his sculptures. A world where the quantum imagination comes alive out of the quantum void. A world where traditional sculpture meets its antisculpture.

Giacometti's work is iconic and easily recognizable now. Not always though as it took a while for the works to be displayed beginning after

117 Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, 62.

the Second World War, in part, with the encouragement of J.P. Sartre. Sartre wrote a couple of articles on the exhibitions tying them to some of the philosophical ideas in his existentialism.¹¹⁸ Since the twenty-first century the pace of exhibitions signalled Giacometti's arrival as a significant artist.

The Giacometti sculpture described below is one example found at the Art Gallery of Ontario. The sculpture itself measures only 32.1 centimetres, which was typical of the many small works Giacometti made. The work is entitled simply *Standing Figure* and is dated 1956.¹¹⁹

At the time of the *Standing Figure*, the common understanding of space and, particularly, outer space was that it was primarily a vacuum, a void, and with the exception of planets and stars – there was nothing there. Today under quantum physics it is space/time with its multi-dimensions would be better where the vacuum is a field of energy waves with particles appearing and disappearing. Yet, for all intents and purposes travel through the waves is still travel without encounter. Yet, of course there are bodies which might be called material/plenum evidenced by the stars and planets. That is, space as both void/vacuum and material/plenum at the same time.

It is with this understanding that Giacometti proceeds to reverse the understanding of sculpture itself. The sculpture of the past and, indeed much of today, is done in traditional three Euclidean physical dimensions. The sculptor seeks to replicate the body. He or she recasts the model as if in “real life” with its density and proportions. Giacometti though wishes a more fundamental approach. He “sees” what others do not. He sees quantum space. The body appears arising like a virtual particle in an energy field, and it is this energy which transforms into mass. So, it is with Giacometti who sees the figure as arising out of the void which is part of its very essence. For him, it is exactly in the vacuum that one finds the plenum and in the plenum that one finds the vacuum.¹²⁰

118 The first of J.P. Sartre's articles treats Giacometti's New York exhibition of 1948 entitled *The Pursuit of the Absolute*. The second, entitled *The Paintings of Giacometti*, accompanied the artist's exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, and was published in the June 1954 edition of *Les Temps Modernes*.

119 Alberto Giacometti, *Standing Figure*, 1956, bronze statue, Art Gallery of Ontario, <https://ago.ca/collection/object/71/172>.

120 In an ironic twist, Giacometti was known for his practice of destroying his work often as soon as the piece was completed. A type, if you will, of the annihilation of particles by antiparticles in the virtual field.

The *Standing Figure* is itself a body consumed by the very space it inhabits, stripping away the outer ring of mass for a collapsed density of the thin figure. Its very thinness attesting to its core – a type of neutron nucleus. Yet, for all of that it is a sculpture – a sculpture of a figure for the quantum imagination.

FOLD 6: ART WITH THE DENSITY OF A BLACK HOLE

The Gates of Hell: Rodin and the Promised Land

There is a sense that cubist geometry, the exploding of the Euclidean world that will usher in the quantum, began as well with Auguste Rodin. As Rodin put it, “Cubic reason is the mistress of things, not appearances.”¹²¹ Rodin sensed that the forms of modern aesthetics had to be exploded, especially with the scientific revolution that was going on all around him. By his sculpture Rodin was able to shift the spatial field, transforming its static equilibrium into a vector of reenergized senses. The spatial field that emerged was suited to the “fin du millénium,” to the passage from the heaven of the nineteenth century toward the hell to come. As Rodin “orbits” back into view he may also have a similar function for this millennium.

Sculpture, as Michel Serres writes in his *Statues*¹²² is a meeting of two vectors, two overlapping fields, that of the statue and of the statutes, architecture and the law. The statue is the result of the sculpted space that encloses the figure in a format. Each format arrests the haemorrhaging of energy and life creating a defence of the object, of the stable, of the enduring. It is the presence of a form of death in the arresting of time.

But it is only so as an image, as a simulacrum of what the sculpture “stands” for (whether this “standing” has a referent or not). Sculpture occupies space in the same way (but also different) as an occupying army with which it shares a lineage. For, as Serres points out, one of the original sculptures was the *Trojan Horse*. The horse took its revenge on those who thought of it as a “gift,” as the free unreciprocal giving

121 Quoted in Ionel Jianou, *Rodin* (Paris: Arted, 1986), 24.

122 Michel Serres, *Statues* (Paris: Editions François Bourin, 1987).

to the other. Hence, sculpture is a root of the exchange economy, of the demand for payment for what one has received. And this continues, as Serres suggests, in the calls for payment in modern sculpture.

Take, for example, the space shuttle *Challenger* which also sculpted space and whose "objectivity," its "thrownness" as it were, extracted the sacrifice, the wasting of lives of the social as a ritual payment for the tempting of the gods. As René Girard has suggested, the sculpture as twin, as simulacrum, requires the violence of sacrifice and, hence, the recourse, by the social, to the statues twin, the statute to make the laws to control the sacrifice.¹²³

Welcome, then, to the world initiated and continued by Rodin, to his *The Gates of Hell* – welcome to the site of the greatest sacrifice of all, to hell.

Rodin's work names not only the passage of capitalism to its advanced aesthetic form; it attempts to break the stasis of the commodity. It tries to put all into circulation through the gateway of sacrifice itself. Rodin's spatial field is created by the fusion of energy, of its capture and subsequent bounding (statutes), making energy into mass, into the figures, the mass ready to explode, to be sacrificed to the gods. Just as time is itself is brought to the moment of implosion in the blackness of *The Gates* – a black body, a black hole – that absorbs the sensual energy of the culture. It is not surprising that his contemporaries also called Rodin, "The Michelangelo of the goiter."¹²⁴

What of *The Gates* themselves? More than two hundred figures, each one a node of the power grid of modern mythology, are sculpted ready to be given up in the passage into the new world of hell. *The Gates* become a world sheet that maps the image-repertoire of Western culture. The operator that controls this last and greatest of all exchangers is the kinetic geometry expressed by Rodin himself: "Geometry is at bottom of sentiment or rather that each expression of sentiment is made by a movement governed by geometry."¹²⁵ That is, the field equations come first providing the world sheet upon which events are unfolded and folded. This field is none other than the field of modernity itself – the Hobbesian field of desire, power, and above all movement in the fight against death and sacrifice. Rodin is again the truth-sayer of Rodin – "All is movement in my *Gates of Hell*."¹²⁶

The Gates can, thus, be seen as naming the dynamic against the stasis of Rodin's "official" contemporaries through the recourse to sensuality and the "goiter," rather than morality, to cubist geometry rather than "perspective,"

123 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

124 Jianou, *Rodin*, 23.

125 Jianou, *Rodin*, 15.

126 Jianou, *Rodin*, 15.



Figure 50. Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, Philadelphia Museum of Art: Bequest of Jules E. Mastbaum, 1929. F1929-7-128.

to movement rather than equilibrium. Each form of stasis is reversed, is transformed by the energy operator; *The Thinker* turns to energy, *Eve* moves from sin to sensuality, the *Prodigal Son* from downcast eyes to upward metamorphosis, *Ugolino* from father/progenitor to child destroyer. Rodin also reverses the laws of nature: *The Falling Man* overcoming the physics of Newtonian gravity, and the *Old Courtesan* the laws of sex. As Paul Virilio suggests, Rodin becomes one of the first “cinéaste” making images dynamic.¹²⁷

127 Paul Virilio, *Cybermonde, la politique du pire* (Paris: Les Editions Textuel, 1996), 24–5.

Nevertheless, *The Gates* remained closed for Rodin – in yet another reversal of Western mythology of the “Promised Land.” The figures are always on the verge but never overcome the stasis of the modern; always embodied, always trapped just as Rodin’s hands are in the “Gothic Dance of Death.” *The Gates* remains the unfinished masterpiece, as it is not able to leap over its own shadow. *The Gates* is the marker, the boundary, the law of the modern, the high point of modern sculpture itself. But *The Gates* will open, after Rodin’s death, and will become the conductor, the switch that passes the virus, the sacrificial culture on to a new generation.

FOLD 6: COUNTER-GRADIENT



Figure 51. Jackson 2bears, *Iron Tomahawks. Episode 27*, Live Cinema Performance. Courtesy of the artist.

The World Screen of the Twenty-First Century

What opens Rodin’s *The Gates of Hell* is the energy of artistic perception – always probing, uncovering, transforming, mutating.

Rodin represented the perfect counterpoint of modernist aesthetics with his cubic reason, vectors of reenergized senses, acute sensitivity to sacrificial violence, sculptural focus on sensuality, motion, and energy. In his artistic imagination what is at stake in sculpture is the fabric of space and time itself. In this case, sculpture is the first of all artistic expressions to fall under the influence of the second law of thermodynamics, falling sideways into entropy, into the captured space of figuration. But that’s definitely not Rodin. His art moves in precisely the opposite direction, sculpting on *The Gates* two hundred

figures as haunting talismans of the future that is now. Sensuality, movement, energy – the image-repertoire of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Like an artistic time capsule, Rodin's *The Gates of Hell* is, indeed, a world sheet tracing the dominant mythologies of his period.

We, the inheritors of all the intense energy, sacrificial violence, restless movement, and complicated sensuality prefigured so powerfully by *The Gates of Hell* have our own world sheet, except in these times replete with the electronic, it is a *world screen*. Part artistic, part factual, the world screen of the twenty-first century represents trajectories of catastrophe as well as forms of courageous resistance and resilient creativity. It mixes powers and dominations, resurgence and recessions, desolation and hope. What's best, *our* world screen is a work in progress, waiting for the restless winds of history, the power of nature, the creative sparks of human imagination to fill in the missing blanks. Which surely they will since seemingly everywhere now key trajectories of the future rise in the form of energy operators – some taking the form of important tendencies, others as artists whose aesthetic productions are intimations of the fate of the world screen of the twenty-first century. Consider these first entries written at the breaking dawn of a century that stretches before us fully enigmatic with its entanglement of desolation, hope, resistance, and cruelties.

"In the Future, Everything Will Be Fine"



Figure 52. Adrienne Matheusik, *In the Future, Everything Will Be Fine*.
Courtesy of the artist.

In the future...
 everything will be great.
 billionaires will leave the planet and our only option will be to die on
 earth or work for them so that they'll take us with them.
 All (space) colonies will fail.
 everything will be fine.¹²⁸

That's the poetry of the future written by Adrienne Matheuszik, a brilliant emerging artist of the new generation – Jamaican and settler-Canadian, interdisciplinary, with a mind running at the edge of a critically engaged artistic imagination and fabulous digital skills (video, physical computing, deconstructive coding, and 3D design), her art focuses on "speculative futures" and "using sci-fi to examine the possibility of the post-colonial." We can catch a glimpse of that speculative future in two of her latest projects: *Proxima-B* and *Into the Void*. Dispensing with the drudgery of failed space shots and hard landings on the moon, *Proxima-B* (2021) takes a different cue. It translates the visual vocabulary of earthbound luxury resorts into space. As Matheuszik states: "*Proxima-B* is an extra-planetary resort, capitalizing on the replicable experiences of luxury resorts on earth and translating the pristine pools, expansive views and lush lounges to alien landscapes." Just so right for all those billionaires in planet flight from mother earth, but still hot and heavy for the luxury resort experience in "alien landscapes," and trying to push out of mind that fatal penultimate line of the poem: "All (space) colonies will fail." Or, even more worrisome, trying not to think about the (extraplanetary) fact that, as the first post-earth settlers, they are now actually living in the reality of another artwork created by Matheuszik, this time *Into the Void* (2021), where alien landscapes are always navigated "on the precipice of the void." In deep space as in life, it seems that walking a tightrope across the precipice of the void will continue to be a sure and certain marker of life in the future.

Datamoshing

DATAMOSHING? Consider the art of keiko hart. A young performance artist interested in creative deconstructions of the stability of the "self," Hart brings illusions of appearance, ambiguity, vague specificity, and entanglement into visibility through digitally mediated performance.

128 <http://adriennematheuszik.com/future.html>.



Figure 53. keiko hart, *is this real(?)life(?)drawing(?)*. Courtesy of the artist.

KEIKOBOT is a chatbot that simulates human presence through gesture, imitation, curiosity, wild conversation. Presented as part of *QUEERSPHERE*, *KEIKOBOT* powerfully takes up the aesthetic vision of the collective exhibition, namely to explore “QUEER and TRANS dreamographies in a time of accelerated closures and isolation.”¹²⁹ As keiko describes the performance:

Keikobot is me, the artist, roleplaying as a chatbot satirically simulating a chatbot simulating human conversation in real time, specifically with queer, radicalized communities in mind, envisioning a more inclusive future. This is a critique of the internet/web applications/algorithms/etc. having been made and controlled mostly by white CIS men in military industrial complexes, and is urging people to question the ramifications of AI bias. This project is (potentially) ongoing as the keikobot is archived online and available publicly, and the chat can be switched back on for interested galleries or festivals.¹³⁰

129 Keiko Hart, “keikobot – performance by Keiko Hart,” InterAccess, 24 February 2021, <https://interaccess.org/event/2021/keikobot-performance-keiko-hart>.

130 keiko hart, email communication, 7 February 2022.



Figure 54. keiko hart, *is this real(?)life(?)drawing(?)*. Courtesy of the artist.

What the self has become in a time of streamed identity, remix memory, and fuzzy connections is the aesthetic focus of Hart's haunting digital performance, *is this real(?)life(?) drawing(?)*¹³¹

Life isn't still; life is constant motion. *is this real(?)life(?)drawing(?)* and *unstill life drawing* are two back-to-back participatory live-streamed performances that reimagine the practice of life drawing. The live-stream feed is disrupted and manipulated using a variety of glitches, obscuring any definitive visual perceptions to encourage alternative modes of interpretation. Instead of traditionally "drawing" what one sees, spectators are invited to write what they see in order to include reflections outside the parameters of eyesight.

In the first session, *is this real(?)life(?)drawing(?)*, artist acts as nude model and performer, subverting masculine vantages by controlling the frame through which they are viewed. The second session, *unstill life drawing*, utilizes an array of fluctuating props to interrupt typical life drawing scenes with movement and satire.¹³²

131 The performance was originally commissioned by Katie Micak and InterAccess for Vector Festival 2020, <https://interaccess.org/event/2020/real-life-drawing-unstill-life-drawing-performance>.

132 Excerpt from the exhibition text.

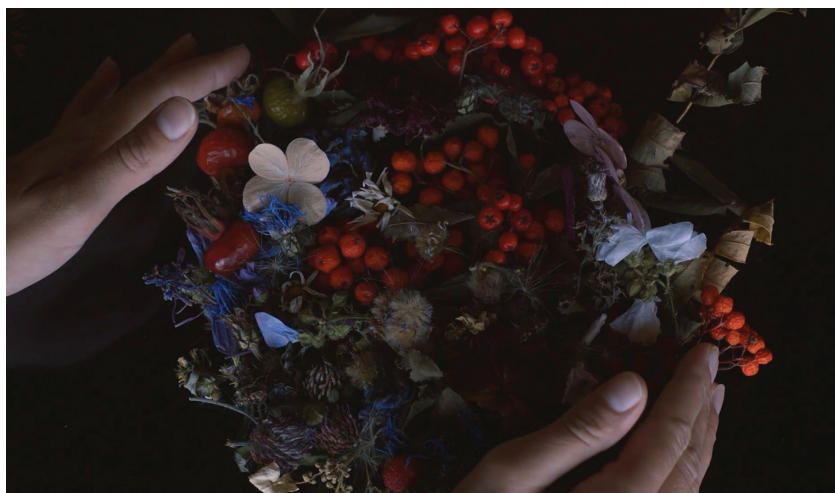
With this we are suddenly deep in the liquid world of datamoshing where participants are invited to explore life drawing in a time of digital flux. It's just perfect for the times. Images of the self never fixed, the data stream interrupted and disrupted by unexpected errors, mischief glitches, digital static, all visual percepts shaded into obscurity, with the datamoshed self that emerges precisely what we have all become in this time of strange disruptions, fast-acting accelerants, gravity well slowness, and confused online identities. In a clear case of margins quickly becoming the centre of (aesthetic) things, keiko's powerful practice of datamoshing moves from its performance at CB Nuit on the west coast of Newfoundland to become nothing less than a life drawing of the new self – the *streamed* self – launched by the technologically intensive image-repertoire that is the twenty-first century.

Intimacy and Memory for a Time of Lonesome

The art of intimacy, memory, and entanglements shines right through the artistic imagination of naakita feldman-kiss. With the always bad news front that is pandemic isolation, stormy weather blowing in from the global economy, and the chasm opening right before us that is climate crisis, it could not happen a moment too soon. More than ever, there is a desperate need to listen to the rhythms of the natural world and, in that listening, to explore broken, shattered, and isolated rhythms of our own personal world. In the way of the best of all things, the artwork of feldman-kiss serves as an artistic warp hole for connecting once again to intimate moments, diasporic family histories, broken connections, threads of meaningfulness in crowdsourced conversations. Connection to that long longed for world of vital reconnects with ourselves, friends, grandmothers, genealogy, the land, water, and air we live on and within is the particular focus of their wonderful artistic productions. Montreal-based, they describe themselves as a “queer artist of mixed roots” with an artistic practice that “explores intergenerational memory, diasporic identity, changing landscape and contemporary applications of oral tradition.”¹³³ The sense of haunting that streams through their artwork is nowhere more powerfully presented than in *Stone Tape: A Haunting*.¹³⁴ It is as

133 <https://naakitafeldmankiss.com/>.

134 <https://naakitafeldmankiss.com/selected-works>.



Figures 55 & 56. naakita feldman-kiss, Video stills from *Stone Tape: A Haunting* 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

aesthetically simple in its design as it is haunting in its significance. In this video performance we are brought into intimate connection with haunted spaces of memory of land – land disappeared, land forgotten, land remembered and recreated tenderly and with love. Most of all, in participating in the video series, we are brought directly into another land, the land of duration that dwells within us. And all this begins with a beautiful series of aesthetic gestures: a hand

and tattooed arm brushing clean the black screen, the slow assembly of an astonishingly beautiful bouquet – red berries, leaves, twigs, branches, brightly hued flowers, apples and feathers. This is the art of slow entanglement for a society shedding its intimate memories in the blur of the fast.

Remix Identity

Remix Identify is the creative vector of the performance artist Jackson 2bears, a Mohawk multimedia installation artist and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Arts Research and Technology at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, whose artistic imagination translates land-based cultural theory into deeply evocative digital performances. Jackson 2bears is a member of Beat Nation, an Indigenous collective of hip hop artists, and is a founder of Noxious Sector. His artistic imagination focuses on remix identity as the sign of the times for art in the twenty-first century. One of his early works was *Iron Tomahawks*,¹³⁵ a live scratch video/cinema performance using tracking technology, vinyl records coded with audio signals that were processed through computer software with pitch detection algorithms, and which were then cut up and remixed with samples of the contemporary world screen – internet video, chat room gossip, documentaries, streamed films. Literally, remixing the world of sound, music, and images and, in the process, remixing identity as well, by deconstructing the image-repertoire of colonial time and white space to destabilize Indigenous stereotypes in popular culture.

Time Tunnelling

In quantum physics, there is a phenomenon known as “tunnelling” whereby warp holes in the fabric of space/time suddenly open up, providing unexpected opportunities for travel between past and future. However, we do not have to wait for time machines to be developed in supersecret laboratories to fully realize time tunnelling since something like it has become the energy operator of contemporary history, with the

135 Jackson 2bears, *Iron Tomahawks*, 2005 to present, live cinema, scratch video performance, <https://jackson2bears.net/iron-tomahawks-project>.



Figure 57. *Evanescing This Harrowed Strata*, 2017, Rennie Brown, performance by Jackson 2bears and Tanya Doody. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 58. Jackson 2bears performance. Courtesy of the artist.

political landscape littered by warp holes linking present realities to the distant past of Islamic Caliphates, messianic Christian visions of “End Times,” unchallenged male privilege, unconstrained white power, uni-polar American empire. Everywhere the cyber-military future clashes with the religious fundamentalist past; nostalgic memories of white male privilege are confronted by surging demands for racial, sexual, gender, and Indigenous inclusion; the harsh reality of corporate harvesting of nature is met with powerful dreams of ecological harmony. The real question is: now that we have linked past and present, what does the future hold? That is, what’s at the end of the (time) tunnel?

Spinning, Dying Neutron Stars from Deep Space

Recently, there was a strange report about something never seen before in deep space – a spinning, dying neutron star in slow rotation with a supercharged magnetic field sending off powerful radio signals every eighteen minutes.¹³⁶ After its usual blast of hyperbole with descriptions of the star as a “celestial lighthouse,” CNN did manage to tell the story of massive dead stars, some slow transients, others very fast, but all of them remnants of dying stars, slowly spinning across the night-time sky as gravestones of a stellar death far, far away. Even astronomers described the event as “spooky,” reporting that nothing like this has ever been seen before and, in astronomical terms, so proximate to earth with its transient passage brushing past us at only four thousand light years distant – the remnants of the starry way travelling aimlessly through deep space, like a stellar nomad on its way to nowhere. But that is probably only part of the story because astronomy’s lasting contribution has usually been as a gateway to mythology. Viewed mythically, what omen about the human future, what fateful sign of the times near or far, is revealed by this “celestial lighthouse” in the skyless sky of deep space? Could its lonely passage with its slower rotation and powerful signal possibly be a message from the wisdom of the cosmos? Not so much about astronomical accounts of the physics of massive dead stars, but something actually closer to home – an intimation of our own earthly future after the extinction-event? At some point, either far distant when planet earth is destined according to astronomical actuarial tables to be swallowed up by our expanding sun or, more likely,

136 Ashley Strickland, “Unknown Space Object Beaming Out Radio Signals Every 18 Minutes Remains a Mystery,” CNN, 26 January 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/26/world/unusual-space-object-transient-scn/index.html>.

in a not too distant future, possibly after ecological death, planet earth, too, may float across the horizon of astronomical observation – silent, charred, uninhabited, extinct. Its rotation may have quickened sending out a signal for all with ears to hear hearing, or its astronomical fate may be more anonymous – another dark planet in ruins travelling through galactic solitude in perpetual drift, the story of its stellar history never to be told again in song or verse.

AI Goes Psychic

It was bound to happen sooner than later. Buoyed by its string of successful technological innovations – quantum computing, deep machine learning, vaccines, autonomous vehicles, language processing – AI has now placed its bets on remaking the brain. Not surgically like those old Frankenstein movies, but in fun ways, this time in the language of nightly entertainment. That's all those immensely popular streaming services – Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV, and all the rest – which are presented as the golden age of television, but which wouldn't exist for a moment without the golden, data organizing touch of AI algorithms behind the streaming scenes. Like every radically new technological innovation before it, streaming services powered up by the AI algorithms present themselves in the comfortable language of an old medium, in this case television. But, of course, streaming is not television but about getting people (pleasantly) hooked to AI – its amazing profusion of choices, its shaping of entertainment cut to every individuated media taste, its speed, fluidity, dynamism. And with that, AI suddenly goes psychic, its golden possibilities for fun, for unlimited entertainment, entering deeply into the collective cranium as something addictive, mesmerizing, enjoyable, a beautiful cornucopia of individual choice with mass perception now suddenly powered up and running at the speed of AI. Can't live without it. The singularity is here and while it doesn't mean AI machines are outstripping their human creators, it does imply a future of streamed consciousness as synapses in a global electronic brain with perception shaped, processed, and probed by always invisible AI algorithms.

Harvesting the Brain

The age of insecurity and anxiety that seems to be the emblematic sign of the twenty-first century has been accompanied by a parallel growth of scientific determinism, nowhere more pronounced than in genomic

biology with its triumphant announcements in favour of the “moral gene” or in new strategies of computation that privilege “Big Data” with human subjectivity reduced to data points in the society of connectivity. Indeed, contemporary digital enthusiasts like to remark that more data has been collected in the last two years than in the entire history of humanity. Our is the age of technological platforms which translate all that scientific determinism into killer apps for public consumption. Interestingly, the recent upsurge of scientific determinism has been challenged in turn by critical movements promoting the concept of neurodiversity. Here, images of the code-challenged brain fade away in favour of forms of creative thought that occupy the splice, the fracture, the boundary, sometimes among animals, plants, and machines and, at other times, in that deeply intimate, necessarily autobiographical space that we call the meeting of individual consciousness with the full diversity of the human circumstance. Or, is it the opposite? Not a new age of neurodiversity, but the growing reality of mono-diversity with bodies as data points, brains jammed with algorithms, individual attention spellbound by the sound of an incoming text, and streaming services facilitating the growth of global entertainment as the new global unconscious. Mono-cropping the brain with neurodiversity carefully stripped away in the gold rush to digitally harvesting perception, imagination, and desire.

4D Organs Looping in the Fifth Dimensional Plane

Forget the body trapped in three dimensions with its organs trapped forever in a fixed geometry of length, width and depth. In virtual space, that has already been exceeded by technologically enabled bodies moving into the fourth dimension – the three dimensions of (Euclidean) space plus the added vector of time. Fourth dimension thinking is the core alphabet of new cybernetic innovations in areas ranging from medical anatomical modelling, genetic sequencing of cellular development, and seemingly everywhere in large-scale construction projects where long-range planning requires tracking the future in terms of work schedules, material requirements, and financing. But then again, that’s really not news to the biological (human) body which was actually born in the fourth dimension, with its three-dimensional organs at birth fated to live and die within and across time. It’s called human finitude, with the dimension of time the vital vector that transforms bodies with organs into that singularity that we know well as the history of an individual life. Now that advanced technologies associated with AI

are moving rapidly into the fifth dimension (augmented intelligence), human ingenuity probably won't be far behind, with spiritual futurists already posting YouTube meditations on fifth dimension consciousness – mind awareness which seeks to leave behind heavy attachments that anchor, push, and pull down bodily awareness in favour of the fifth dimensional plane where the mind becomes one with star systems and distant nebula. When consciousness is added to vectors of time and space, the body of the future is just about to become n-dimensional – the quantum body.

Hoping for the Best but Mourning the Rest

The real epidemic of these pandemic times is cancer. It infects, mutates, and thrives. It never goes away. It is increasing exponentially. These days it seems everyone has a cancer story to tell – about themselves, a good friend, a family member, a couple together on a love journey through the pathways of life. Cancer usually strikes without warning. It definitely accelerates cold solitude from the heat of the social rush. Its pain is solitary. Its anguish is existential. The shock of its arrival reduces many people to silence. You are suddenly in a world of your own. Who can find the words to describe something so monumental, so epic, so possibly terminal? And who is really prepared in their heart of hearts for thinking nothingness, for feeling, really feeling, a world of love, pain, joy, fun, and just plain crazy energy that will madcap on its way into the future without you? Who is ready to wave a sad goodbye to themselves as a living, breathing, vital presence without a sure and certain exit to the future? Who is really prepared to cross the river?

So then, the *will to live*. Bodies with cancer are slammed through two very different zones of high stress simultaneously. The fate of the biological body with its precious singularity of bone, nerves, skin, and blood is precipitously and unexpectedly wagered on something intensely *primitive*, intimate, and absolutely out of control – wild cellular chain reactions gone badly wrong, their dangerous viral mutations taking bodies with cancer swiftly and unpredictably into dark and lonely pathways of unrelieved solitude and spasms of suffering, with thriving or death the only cards left on the lonely table. The other high-stress zone of cancerous bodies is their medical transformation into the body *virtual* with massive imaging machines forcing the body to reveal its secrets, by X-rays, CT scans, and positron emission tomography (PET scans). And in that strange liminal zone where the body



Figure 59. Lynn Baron, *Hope Breaks*. Courtesy of the artist.

with cancer floats between primitive chaos and virtual order, there are always blasts of radiation and scorched-earth, toxic flows of chemotherapy to mediate the difference, with lots of drugs to numb away the pain.

But still, that doesn't get to the essential truth of the cancer epidemic. For that, we need to turn to sensitive artists who have photographed, painted, sung, sculpted, written about, blogged, or podcasted stories of their own struggle. Consider the artist, Lynn Baron. She was reluctant to reveal photography of her cancer journey, saying that the images were too unplanned, unfocused, maybe even unprofessional. As if any of that mattered. As if cancer, which is itself unfocused, unplanned, definitely bent on guttering out the professional in any of its hijacked bodies, should not give rise to a form of photography with those very same aesthetic qualities. Uncanny photography, then, for a cancer epidemic that itself specializes in cruelties of body hacking. Fragmented images for bodies living on fragments of finitude. And so, a haunting photographic exhibition that dwells, really dwells, on those quiet moments of profound anguish – feeling sick, feeling



Figure 60. Lynn Baron, *Hope Breaks*. Courtesy of the artist.

dread, feeling tired and isolated, taking a bath, hearing disembodied voices, lamenting the body beautiful radiated or cut away, putting on your face for another brave day at the show, not being able to fall asleep with worry and anxiety, having your body reassembled by anonymous machines, hoping for the best but mourning all the rest. A photography of the soul. A photography of severity and vulnerability, with truth-telling its aesthetic, lament its nervous tissue and an unflinching (photographic) eye its resurgence. Or, as the artist, Lynn Baron, says about this writing and the watery horizon-line that is her photography:

the writing is sad, intense, the image soft, warm, yet frightening as pain and hope break the surface of the water. and that is the story of cancer – now seen, painful, frightening, where, heading into the deep, there may be, there is, hope.

The writing is sad, intense, the image and the color red, maybe even white, the tone of the skin, significant, hopeful and frightening at the same time, the depths of the openings in the surface of the water speak perhaps

to deep pain, hidden and yet hopeful in some way that your words are. And that is what the story of cancer is – painful, frightening, yet heading into the storm, there is, maybe, hope.

From Kathy Acker

Sadly, she died too soon, with all her writing only now coming into its own posthumously. *Pussy, King of the Pirates, Blood and Guts in High School, Eurydice in the Underground, My Mother: Demonology, Portrait of an Eye, I Dreamt I was a Nymphomaniac: Imaging*. Acker is desperately needed. Her writing, with its stories of childhood trauma, sexual rebellion, tattooed flesh and always phantasmagorical identity, is just so perfect for the troubled streets of a troubled land. Not just her literary themes which foreshadow all the dominant myths still slowly working their way out in the world screen of the twenty-first century. But her writing style which was so beautifully quantum with words that held parallel universes in their meaning, sentences which sparkled with high velocity and slow entanglements, sprays of words that were like particles moving across the skin of sex, screams of pain that told the truth about everyone's underground of crazy high schools, mother-daughter feuds, Pussy riding high as King of the Pirates, literature itself as a flickering signifier where the only thing that counts is healing the wound of a lonely word, a phrase, a myth, a body. Kathy Acker's mind dreamed a world screen that she was never going to see, but, like Nietzsche before her, she knew that her writings would only every really be understood posthumously. Now that we actually live in the demonology of blood and guts that she foresaw so clearly, it can be said that her lasting legacy is to have dreamed the future that is now, faithfully recorded its nightmares and ecstasy in the living body of her writing, encouraging us to travel with her Eurydice in all the under-grounds of a solitary human life.

Neon Dreams: Marilouise Kroker, Sheila Cook & Lena Dmytriw (Baron)

Like Kathy Acker, Marilouise Kroker also died far too soon, her absence from the flow of life deeply lamented. She died at the height of her times with her lucid intelligence intense, her vision of the future prescient, and her sensitivity acute to the daily theatre of good and evil in a turbulent world. In fact, she may have

provided the key to understanding the twenty-first century when she once wrote a poem titled *Neon Dreams* with its refrain: "Life is a breath away / from ice-jammed fate / and concrete edges / Black and white dreams and shredded consequences / So dream me a dream of neon dreams and complicated wishes / cool clear thoughts and red ripe kisses." Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of Pirates* would have understood that sentiment, which is probably why they were such close intellectual friends, both vital spirits, immensely strong women, beautifully independent thinkers, bursting with energy, writing every day the song in their hearts, the dream in their dreams, and how best to make the logic of (male) things take a big tumble. And that sentiment just blows its way now into contemporary pandemic times with its ice-jammed fate, concrete edges, and shredded consequences. Marilouise wrote and edited many books – *Body Invaders, The Hysterical Male, Feminism Now, Hacking the Future, Critical Digital Studies* – edited many scholarly journals, performed her writings in film, video, spoken word poetry and in the theatre of public spaces, making her one of those rare individuals whose thought was truly indispensable to the human circumstance. Her memory inspires us.

Like Marilouise, Sheila Cook was an important contributor to the world screen of the twenty-first century. A world whose speed and dimensions only increased as wave after wave of people arrived in a city that was transiting from its colonial past to a metropolis. It was to this that Sheila took her talents as a teacher and educator. It was not only under the literary theorist Northrop Frye's call for an "Educated Imagination" but also under her insight into the need for empathy; not only in daily life but in the classroom which she wrote about. For the city was a multidimensional matrix which she addressed. Beginning with opening opportunities for young individuals who were in public housing in a valley below a wealthy neighbourhood, she brought both the classroom to life but also the library to many who struggled to find a book in their homes. Teaching not only in English but also in French. It was not only the disadvantaged who profited but so many adult newcomers to Canada struggling to master the English language as she taught both the language and the culture of Canada that she knew would be changed by the intertwining of each culture. She taught not only younger children but also with young adults she met in the university classroom. Creating new programs in education that brought the society and our responsibilities into the classroom, programs that sent students abroad to experience teaching in different countries, notably France and China, and that also welcomed foreign

teachers to come to Canada, opportunities that allowed students to experience our Indigenous past, programs that transitioned her students to professional teaching degrees, programs like *Hey Teach* that offered the opportunity to write and be published and opportunities to interact together in *I Teach*. It's time, in fact, it's well past time, to finally honour teachers with neon dreams sparkling with empathy and insight.

So then, let us honor the name of strong, independent women everywhere who make of their lives an often unnoticed, usually unheralded, act of beautiful poetry. Like Lena Dmytriw (Baron), an immensely vibrant woman of Ukrainian descent born on the Canadian prairies, resilient, courageous, graceful, growing up with absolutely no opportunities at hand in public education or work, professional or the trades, struggling to survive against all the odds, raising single-handed a family of eleven children, living on the land, growing nutritious food, canning vegetables for the winter months, cooking and baking for many hungry children every day, every meal, taking care of their urgent needs, physical for sure but also spiritual, ethical needs for guidance, living within herself since like, many women before and after her, all her energy was focused, had to be focused, on the survival of her large family in always hard, poverty-stricken times. The results of this single-handed, defensive, and mindful labour of a woman? Eleven children sent out to fend for themselves in a world that could and would hurt, all eleven of them destined for success while following different pathways of life, with love the connecting thread. She often said that her strength came from faith, not understanding that she was her own god, her own dancing star, and that her strength came from her. Inside her own four walls, her children her audience, she was a singer, a dancer, an orator, a woman of wisdom, with a subtle sense of humor and convictions. Unheralded and irreplaceable. In other times and places, she might have been the dancing star that she truly was in singing, dancing, speaking, thinking. In other times and places, she might have soared into public imagination as the bright morning star that was her possible destiny. All honor then to the memory of Lena Dmytriw (Baron), this inspiring woman who lived to make herself truly singular, certainly to her grateful, loving family, but now by this simple act of remembrance, the shared memory of a woman's life that goes beyond the limits of private experience to put its sparkling mark on the public imagination as the truly indispensable woman – struggling against the odds in a harsh climate, overcoming solitude, holding a family of eleven children together through lean times, teaching by example personal ethics in the hardest of hard times, always persevering, loving, caring with just so

much creativity bundled up tight, waiting to be expressed. Her legacy? Inspiration, strength, love, to do the right thing even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Lena. Strong. Ukrainian strong.

When the Drone Sky Rains Murder

Who speaks today for the victims of drone warfare, particularly those still morally unacknowledged fellow human beings in far distant lands rendered into “collateral damage” by the greater games of the war machine? Just because the casualty figures of innocent people killed by drones from the sky are so large, and the highly promoted illusion of “surgical targeting” such a bitter joke, the masters of the war machine have been truly reluctant to divulge the price paid by innocent people for their technological hubris. When the list of global casualties from violence from the sky is finally tabulated, it should also dwell carefully on something else that has certainly been assassinated by drone warfare. This time, not bodies on the ground in distant towns and villages, but something closer to home – the death of public ethics. The effective disappearance of a public ethics of empathy and responsibility has been brought to a frenzied pitch by the increasingly anonymous decision-making path involved in drone targeting. Here, drone targeting decisions – who lives and who dies – is made by powerful political and military leaders ensconced in comfortable offices in the homeland, while the consequential results of those decisions on the bodies of the vulnerable, the unsuspecting, the morally unacknowledged occur at a safe (technologically enabled) distance. Remote ethics for better drone targeting, with drone warfare generating a two-dimensional order of violence. Certainly, the violence involved in drones raining murder from the sky on unsuspecting people in remote areas, but terminal violence against public ethics itself as decision-makers in the drone targeting loop are always at one remove from the consequences of their actions. Drone strikes from the sky, then, a sign of the times – absolute immunity from ethical responsibility also means absolute murder.

Cold War Redux

Reruns everywhere these days. Just like television, why not international politics? If domestic audiences got hooked on the logic of the Cold War first time around with its clashing binaries of good versus

evil (Soviet-style Communism versus the “Free World” USA and its NATO allies), why not spin the same narrative again for purposes of re-energized domestic cohesion? This time though the situation is different. For the past three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), international politics has witnessed a unipolar world with the USA at the wheel of history, crashing big time for sure in Iraq and Afghanistan but, for all that, still managing to be the key dealer at the table of international power setting down a “rules based order” tilted in its favour for everyone to play by. With the rise of China, the energy-driven resurgence of Russia, and the domestic retreat of American politics into defensive nationalism, international power has suddenly slipped its unipolar chains, instantly changing into the present reality of a multipolar world with many competing empires seeking the crown. From the bipolar world of the Cold War, to the unipolar world order post-1989, and now, most definitely, a multipolar world with the United States as a tired player late at night, its stack of chips depleted, but, still for all that, its desire for mastery of the world order situation undiminished.

What to do? Confronted with a radically changed international situation, a declining empire like the USA does what it has to do. It quickly launches out of the messy reality of a world gone multipolar and begins to play the game of media simulation – simulating a rerun of the good old days of the Cold War, reducing everything to a fatal binary contest between good and evil, with both China and Russia this time accused of not playing by the (American) rules-based order. With this, the strategy of containment is back (South China Sea, encirclement of Russia), Cold War warriors are suddenly in demand again as guests on Sunday talk shows, punitive sanctions are imposed, trading tariffs increased, lines in the sand drawn, NATO revived from its deep sleep, and domestic popular opinion is saturated by with feverish rhetoric of good and evil.

However, the only problem is that the world truly has morphed in the direction of the multipolar, with many holes in the dike of a binary world threatening to disturb the scenario. North Korea gambles on long-range missiles, Iran sticks to dreams of nukes, the Middle East seethes with potential conflicts, coups in Africa as well as South and Latin America witness popular discontent against the imperatives of world capitalism. In the end, it's all too much for a unipolar empire like the USA which is now stretched to the limit of its global ground force capabilities and limited by domestic opinion which is suddenly right wing populist and increasingly isolationist. It could do what many declining empires have done before it, namely go gracefully into the dark sleep of night. But that's definitely not the American way, which has always wagered

its imperial fate on aggressiveness, creativity, unpredictability, and the constant projection of power. Dealt a losing hand by the game of history, it does what's next best, namely to fight the reality of a suddenly multipolar world by seeking to orchestrate events around a rerun of that which worked perfectly before. So then, the irreality of a suddenly binary world stretches before like a soothing rerun of the logic of the Cold War. With this, the future of the twenty-first century is quickly rewritten by the masters of power nostalgic for the good old (Cold War) days of the twentieth century. Clashing simulacra with ghosts of the past reanimated for a new theatrical run of global power.

Drive-Thru Insurgency

"Take a stand for freedom from the comfort of your own vehicle!"¹³⁷

Fighting for the right to be sick is all the rage these days in the only politics that really counts – the politics of the street. Even the supposedly peaceable kingdom of Canada which prides itself on moderation in all things public witnessed a nationwide rebellion against public health restrictions, with truckers, right wing populists (the People's Party of Canada), right wing extremists (the Maverick Party from Alberta), Bible-thumping evangelical Christian ministers and their followers, moms waving hockey sticks with flags attached, snowmobile drivers across the rural stretches of the land waving the "Freedom" crusade on, overpasses everywhere thick with cheering supporters and effigies of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau hanging from dangling nooses, ten million dollars raised instantly in a GoFundMe campaign, Donald Trump, Russell Brand, Elon Musk, and Joe Rogan loudly honking their support in the background, and with just about every rebel with or without a vaccine but certainly without a mask trucking, driving or car pooling their way to a mass protest in Ottawa, the nation's capital in the frigid wintery cold. Frightened by the surging charisma of this assertion of the populist will coming out of the western badlands, mainstream media instantly goes into hyperdrive with televised scenes of the truckers' triumphant road to Jerusalem interrupted by a seemingly unending panel of experts, mostly from security agencies and police forces, warning ominously of lone wolf attacks, extremist violence, a reenactment of the

137 Freedom Convoy (website), accessed 16 January 2023, <https://www.freedomconvoy.ca/>.

events of January 6 in Washington in the snowbank streets of Canada's capital. The prime minister goes into hiding in the name of personal security, the citizens of Ottawa are urged to avoid the downtown, the sheltering warmth of nearby malls are ordered closed with immediate effect, and the citizens of Canada, themselves weary of the unending pandemic, have probably three minds about this – some bitter at the unvaccinated for clogging up ICU units, others dutifully obedient to (ever-changing) public health dictates but, increasingly, bone tired of all the restrictions, and just about everybody, irrespective of their personal opinion on the matter, fascinated by what rarely happens in Canada – a flag-waving, national anthem singing, flag-draped, antivaccine, anti-mask, pro-Trump crowd, right wing for sure but also lots of people obviously no wing, just tired of the restrictions and eager to tell any listening media interviewer that they are there fighting for rights and freedoms. There's another thing as well. And that's the enormous physical presence of hundreds of huge semis blockading the streets: engines running, air horns blasting, drivers sticking to principle and refusing to move, semis effectively weaponized. The cinematic vision of Mad Max comes to the nation's capital, with the political class paralyzed by indecision about which way the winds blow. Next to the heavy-weight, throbbing, air-horn howling, big machine presence of all those semis – Macks, Peterbilts, Western Stars, Freightliners – most of which can haul 30,000 kilograms without losing a beat, riding on the open road high, long, and (macho) aggressive, next to this angry tribe of the Mad Max, police forces looked absolutely puny – the bodies of individual police fragile in comparison to the offending trucks; police on the road forced to look up high and meek before truck drivers hell bent on taking down Babylon; security forces, as a whole, confused about what to do about a convoy of freedom-loving trucks with drivers feverishly plotting together on their CBs, everyone just flat out refusing to budge from Parliament Hill. It's big semis built for endurance with drivers comfortably settling down for the long haul, money definitely no problem with millions of dollars and counting already raised, first on GoFundMe, and then when that was blocked, more instantly raised on Christian fundamentalist equivalents. As for the mass protest itself in the streets of Ottawa, it's the usual. The extreme cold wins, with protesting crowds quickly fleeing to the warmth of trucks, pickups, and all those honking cars. And anyway, it turns out that Parliament itself is under major construction, with no one home and establishment power having itself long ago fled to the shelter of the talking heads of the television studio. But following the traditional pattern of many dinner parties – from hospitality to hostility to the hospital – the dinner party that is The Freedom

Convoy in the streets of Ottawa quickly wears out its welcome: hostility is in the air, and the only question remaining is whether or not the already over-stressed ICU units have room for additional (trucker) patients. Canada has never seen anything like it: semis from the far-off western hinterland squatting the citadel of national power. Police are confused, politicians indecisive, the city occupied, local residents outraged, mainstream media not sure of where this story is going, and public opinion itself hanging in the balance. Like a true blue energy operator, the epic of the trucker convoy has all the speed of the viral. It mutates daily, captures the energy of other vectors, fascinates mainstream media, expands by social media, its fate uncertain, its impact spectacular, its significance still uncertain, its (political) meaning waiting for the final diagnosis. The first of all the drive-thru insurgencies, with many more sure to follow as right wing populism is emboldened, accelerated, and effectively mainstreamed by truck drivers inspired by the clarion call: "Take a stand for freedom from the comfort of your own vehicle!"

FOLD 7: COLD BLUE WITH SKIES THE COLOUR OF MELANCHOLY

Quantum Assassin: Jacques Monory

As we all know, the universe began in a flash – the flash of the Big Bang and the subsequent inflation of the waves that fill the universe with energy/matter. The expansion continues with no end in sight. But for how long: either running out of energy in an entropic finale or maybe continuing on "forever" or maybe coming to stasis in an equilibrium. Pick your cosmological constant. In any case, the end is in the beginning for Jacques Monory, whose artistic creativity is to capture this explosion that will assassinate experience itself.

We begin with his turn in the nineteen eighties, as he looks skyward, for it is there that he finds the scene of a crime that turns into a murder mystery. A mystery of the contract killer who assassinates experience. So, turn one's eyes to the sky – not the sky of Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, but that of the picture of the cosmos taken by the radio telescopes of the world. Here, it is the imaging system of the scientific/technological world that governs our understanding of the universe. That transforms sensation in data bytes. For Monory, the transformation is a murderous act.

Here as well, we find the picture of natural world writ large. Nature that is at once bursting with energy and yet already dead, already just the trace of the quantum interactions that began it all and the waves to come. Signals from past events that have long since happened and long since disappeared even as the quantum fluctuation turns into a new wave but that will reach us in a future signalling another realm of events that are the past. A memory-machine, at least: this is how one can see Monory's *Sky* # 39, produced in 1980. He takes a computer map of the sky generated by radio telescopes and paints 5,766 stars on it.¹³⁸ These stars, however, in Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation, are like holes formed by gunshots that puncture the space/time continuum. They are criminal ballistics. And the stars are the dead remains of this assassination. The aftermath of the bursts of photons that turn into killer photons depicted in the cold of empty space/time carrying the data stream that annihilates one's sensations.

And in this there are no escapes for Monory. Take, for example, his painting *False Exit* #2 executed two years earlier in 1978.¹³⁹ Picture a series of images on the canvas; an ice-covered mountain, a star nebula, the rising sun, the darkened night, the ocean, and the radio telescope. Here are the elements of the earth, not in the harmony of the garden but rather casting a world that has lost its delights. Each of the pathways blocked by the sterility of the capitalist scientific/technological. Each of the exits, whether in the sublime grandeur of the mountains, or the dazzling Milky Way galaxy, or the power of the sea, or warmth of the sun, or the sun, or the calm of night – all incapable of night – all incapable of escaping the contract killer, the absent god of the universe whose death-drive lives on.

So, it is not surprising that many of Monory's earlier works give us images coloured in blue – a blue that is itself at once brilliant but cold in its sterility. A wonderful example of this is the precursor to *Skies* in the series entitled *Murder*. Set not in the cosmos but in the techno-capitalist society. Here in *Murder* #10/2 a scene, depicted in variations of blue with white, where a killer is running from a murder captured by the collapsed corpse at the opposite end of the panels.¹⁴⁰ Between the two ends are the marks of gunshots tracing the path of escape of the killer; the

138 Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Monory, *The Assassination of Experience by Painting – Monory* (London: Black Dog, 1998), 195. One can also find Monory's paintings at jacquesmonory.com.

139 Lyotard and Monory, *The Assassination of Experience*, 206–7.

140 Lyotard and Monory, *The Assassination of Experience*, 103–4.

cosmic stars rendered in the panes of glass that appear like virtual particles from the wave aesthetic. Or take the later series especially, *Death Valley*, #10, *with the Midnight Sun*, done in 1975, which brings together again the earth and sky with the sun passing through the firmament resembling so many bullet holes.¹⁴¹

The classic state of nature also gets an unusual twist at the hands of Monory. Seen through the prism of capitalism, the tranquillity or perhaps indifference of Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* turns, in the *Velvet Jungle* series, into a site of toxic waste and detritus with the women also turned into indicted criminals. This is part of a larger canvas that takes what emerges from nature from the social contract of liberal thought into the contract for assassins and killers.

But there is more than just Monory's hard-edge art. Another side to the nature lies in the very images themselves. One need only to look at the depiction of tigers that Monory paints in a number of works. In *Dreamtiger* #5, a work of 1972, there are again six panels in blue and white.¹⁴² Two are devoted to a nude woman. Doing, if you will, Manet's *Olympia* one better. Two are shots of the world both below and above in a type of transcendental dream. Of particular interest here is the illuminated tiger. Very much in the tradition of William Blake whose "tyger, burning bright" underscores the "fearful symmetry" of his vision.¹⁴³ For Monory as well, the tiger serves as a "strange attractor" drawing the viewer into the cosmological world. The attractor transforms the energy field of the dynamical system that is characterized by disordered sensations into an experience of symmetry. Is this the supersymmetry of the quantum zone where the tigers are the long sought-after particles? Is this a supersymmetry no longer of fire but of the unified field of the aesthetic wave? Has Monory, the assassin, put down his weapons and like the tiger joined the lamb in a new state of nature, in a new state of the spirit? Perhaps here, through the quantum imagination, we can see the future before it happens.

141 Lyotard and Monory, *The Assassination of Experience*, 55–6.

142 Lyotard and Monory, *The Assassination of Experience*, 39.

143 See Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969).

4. EPILOGUE

I Stepped into the Future and It Was Now

So it is with the quantum revolution where life moves at the speed of light yet simultaneously approaches space/time dilation where the now is the quantum zone. It is here both where the old have gone to die, with the dead power of the state, with the ossification of a culture, the disappearance of belief, with the institutions all becoming dwarf stars about to be swallowed by the black holes. But here all are to be eclipsed by the quantum imagination.

And the quantum imagination is everywhere arising from the street, both digital and non-digital, the classroom both digital and non-digital, the home both digital and non-digital. Here, where the creative arts are constantly appearing and disappearing in a zone populated by attractors – above all by the young. It is precisely the creative energy sending particles and waves into the zone that makes the future as now. It is precisely here that the revolution takes to the streets. Art everywhere breaking with the modes of the past bringing the future into existence just as particles emerge from the vacuum.

All of which has panicked the waning powers that try to stop the young from participating in the digital world, from parents, to schools, to religion, to states – above all the world powers – all trying to stop the creative energy that like waves and particles cannot be incarcerated, that reach escape velocity in creative visions.

It is here then that the quantum revolution needs to be pursued, where the revolution is ongoing, where it can be seen, can be experienced precisely because it is taking place. A revolution that surrounds us like the air. It is in the myriad of stories, of drawings, of murals, of creations – all with their unique experiences that populate the quantum zone. Each with their own colours, sounds, images, and trajectories

with which we all are endowed. Each of us on the wave of creation, each of us a particle that carries the future – the quantum revolution.

Riding the Expansion Wave

The Quantum Revolution makes the connect with our grandchildren's generation, since our generation, the baby boomers, has turned out to be a bust, putting everything on the national credit card and leveraging the present by mortgaging the future: over/indebtedness, severe climate change, unaffordable housing, and an imploding social safety net await the young while our "creative leaders" finagle history into predictable reruns including a proposed new Cold War with China and probably an expensive new arms race. The baby boom generation rode the expansion wave until it imploded, leaving the debris for the next generations.

It is only going to get worse. At present dominant patterns of political and social life which first took root in the late 1980s and '90s have now consolidated themselves as key narratives of global culture in the twenty-first century. We've been virtualized to bytes; globalized to hyper-isolation; accelerated to inertia; platformed to distraction; informed to the point of confusion; ventilated by breaking news; rendered melancholic by nothing ever really changing; stuck on Netflix like a phonographic needle frozen repeat-repeat in its track; powered up by iPhones, Androids, and all the rest; but, for all of that, with minds vanishing in plain sight like a strange wasting disease in the spectacles of the digital wasteland; with bodies twitching at the sound of an algorithmic alert; and with the human nervous system actually shrinking as it is *adjusted* to life in the wires by the power of corporate cybernetics.

What was first expressed in the streets of San Francisco in the twilight days of the twentieth century as a cultural struggle between two radically different visions of the future of life in the wires, crystallized in the creative anarchy and brilliant graphics displays of *Mondo* versus the business-oriented, advertising model that was *Wired* magazine, soon blasted its way from the sphere of cultural debate into the triumph of net culture at the speed of corporate power. Here, the swift reduction of the Internet to a ubiquitous advertising machine powered by cookies, algorithms, relational advertising, data mining, and always inquisitive search engines quickly terminated the possibility of the Internet as a creative, open-source new relation of democratic communication. The future stretches before us now as life in technological platforms – limited in their vision to the expansion of the commodity-form, authoritarian in their control mechanisms, shaped by advertising and stock exchange

valuation, and absolutely intent on designing consciousness, emotions, and preferences on a mass scale. But not just the Internet under the desiccating sign of digital capitalism, but increasingly life in the wires as a major extension of the powers of political control, with mass surveillance, data archives, and contact tracing as the newest instruments of the surging national security state. Here, initially brought to life by the psychological trauma of 9/11 and the subsequent production of the War on Terror with its theatrical displays of “enemy combatants” and forced extradition of often innocent people to torture chambers in authoritarian states, the national security state withered into the forever wars of Afghanistan and Iraq. That this pattern of political authoritarianism and manipulated public opinion promises to stretch many generations into the future is evidenced now by carefully orchestrated media attacks on China as a substitute scapegoat justifying massive arms purchases and military expenditures. Literally, the next decade will witness the reprogramming of the ideology of containment that was first perfected in the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union into a new Pacific-oriented strategy of containment against the supposed threat of China. No longer the Iron Curtain, but now the Bamboo Curtain as the phantasmagoria of a national security state which is in desperate need of an ideological scapegoat to obscure the eclipse of the unipolar world under the hegemony of the United States and the inevitable rise of China as a dominant world power. So then, get ready for many years of predictable reruns of the Cold War against the now disappeared Soviet Union with staged communications focusing on China as the newest incarnation of the “evil empire.” The sunshine of power might have risen in the white settler states of the West, but it is most definitely moving across the Pacific skies to set on the surging economies of Asia, with the authoritarian capitalism and creatively energized middle class of China clearly in the lead. In the West, the expansion wave has crested, and what lies ahead is a volatile and dangerous field of floating debris – revolt of populist masses against neo-liberal elites, the unmasking of “truth” as often a pawn in the games of the powerful, the sparking of class war between blue-collar workers competing for scare jobs with desperate economic migrants at the borders, the growing automation of labour which may allow the professional class the privilege of remote work but which is a death knell for the labouring majority, a shrinking social safety net, and everywhere the consolidation of power, privilege, and wealth by a still powerful elite which is as absolute in its determination to maintain its hegemony as it is insensitive to, if not totally contemptuous of, any claims for social justice. Left to its own devices, the future promises a wasteland of cynicism and injustice, with ruling elites

powered up and ready to go all out for new forms of feudalism, twenty-first century style; professionals and technocrats bunkering down for a privileged life of remote labour; the working class with its non-fungible labour forced to compete over scarce resources; and the growing global mass of the dispossessed either excluded by hardened borders or strictly policed by the national security state. The game is set, the cards have been played, the winners are boasting, and the losers resenting. The wheel of history spins out the narrative of the coming years of the twenty-first century: the eclipse of the West and the rise of the East, the fading of Western hegemony into bouts of rage, depression, conflict, and anxiety and the surge of Asia as the calibrator of the global future.

Fickle as the Wind

At least, that is the way the story is supposed to go, and who really knows, it may actually turn out to be the case. But, what is really interesting about *The Quantum Revolution* is that nothing is left to its own devices, that grand narratives can vanish in an instant, that inevitabilities are always haunted by the glitter of instability, that definitive historical trajectories are as fickle as the wind, that the predictable turns out to be beautifully probabilistic, that the absolutely certain is always indeterminate, that cynicism always shares the stage with social justice, and that injustice can be abruptly cancelled by insurgencies in the streets.

That is what is actually happening now, and it is everywhere. Just when we think it is over, the game is actually just beginning. Certainities crumble, absolutes dissolve, contradictions are always *both* true, patterns are usually messy in their details, definitions are inevitably entangled in their complexities, rules change, and the cards dealt bear the sign of the quantum – a future of all *and* nothing, death *and* life, life in ruins mixed with sparkles of brilliant creativity.

For example, consider the following broken narratives of art, technology, and culture under the sign of the quantum. On its surface, these stories most definitely do not have anything to do with spearheading the master narratives of history and certainly would never be officially honoured for their great referential value. Like all really consequential stories today, they are stubbornly minor, marginal at best, precarious and tentative in their meaning, but definitely disruptive because so fleeting, memorable because so deeply rooted in life experience with its jagged edges and unexpected curves – a revolution in perspective in the unlikely form of unsettling art installations, one in Vancouver, BC on the western shores of the continental mass of Turtle Island, and

the other at the Art Gallery of Ontario with its all too frequent parade of substitute art for a (*cinematically*) substitute city. In Toronto, the aesthetic focus is squarely on the life and times of that creatively edgy son of immigrant parents, Andy Warhol. In Vancouver, while waiting, perhaps impatiently, for the real (cash cow art tourist) event, namely a touring exhibition of the life and times of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, gallery space was given over to *Disorientations and Echo*, a powerful upsurge from below featuring the aesthetic visions of over thirty local Vancouver artists.

The Andy Warhol exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario just crackles with the energetic intensity of the death-instinct. The scent of death is everywhere in the art. Famous death masks in the form of photographic triptychs of long-dead icons: Elvis, Marilyn, and Jackie O.; grisly images of a prisoner in the electric chair; videos made by the *Factory* which work to negate any stable visual narrative in favour of the kinetic energy of empty screens, flowing streams of static, randomly jumping lines of data flight; most of all, a truly haunting, self-designed visual death mask of Andy Warhol himself, all the more emotionally compelling because this image of Warhol's face in ruins – skin waxen, eyes hollowed out shells with something missing, hair wildly scrabbled, face harshly backlit – was intentionally created as an aesthetic precession of his own death: the fact of death itself reconfigured into an afterimage of the power of artistic imagination. If the uniquely subversive quality of Warhol's artistic productions lay in its migration of Madison Avenue advertising techniques into the lucrative business of remaking art as business, then the message for the arts community specifically, and perhaps for popular culture as well, is that what really works, what truly animates, energizes, and sparks art, is the seductive power of the death-instinct. Indeed, this is one installation that honours the presence of death in life with such brilliant intensity that its image-repertoire actually ends us disappearing into the death-instinct that it thought it was only imagining.

It's just the opposite at the Vancouver Art Gallery where the art installation, *Disorientations and Echo*, delivers the contemporary goods on the life-instinct. The day that we were there life was just surging outside the art gallery, on the busy urban streets, on the steps of the art gallery where the homeless went to take noon-time shelter, and, most certainly, in a super expensive shopping mall just a stone's throw away from the art installation itself – where, in fact, like a latter-day Warhol art event of which Andy himself would have been justifiably proud, art in the form of aesthetically staged designer clothing was everywhere on display with browsing shoppers as the new artists of the commercial

kind. *Disorientations and Echo* for sure, all entangled with the life of the city with the policed serenity of the designer shopping mall cut with the sounds and sights of the city: a haunting visual sea of orange crosses outside the Vancouver Art Gallery symbolizing murdered and missing Indigenous children from Canada's residential schools; and this right next door to a visually aggressive display of antivaxxer posters, pamphlets, and slogans by a milling, militant crowd of the proudly unvaccinated. From a nearby urban park comes the sounds of Abba's *Dancing Queen*, sung this time by a hard rock singer with a sound that just comes right out of his belly and which, like a little spot of magic on a grey day, casts its spell on listening spectators who, moved perhaps by the music or by memories so beautifully captured by the lyricism of the words and rhythms of the song, can't just sit still for one moment longer, suddenly start dancing in the park – women mostly, dancing queens for the day, moving to the music, swaying to memories of another day, maybe in the past but, who knows for sure, perhaps still in the future of all those *Dancing Queen* days yet to come.

This is all preparatory to actually seeing the insurgent art of *Disorientations and Echo*. It's almost as if the street culture of downtown Vancouver – its malls, protests, memorials, and impromptu music events – had somehow got wind of the upcoming artistic production of *Disorientations and Echo* and was doing its very level best not to disappoint, but to turn the madness and the wisdom of the streets into a fabulous celebration of the indeterminate, the contradiction, fast bodies and slow sounds, the mood on the street shifting at escape velocity, the mood in the nearby canyon of designer stores shaped as usual by that biggest wave of all – business at the speed of art.

And just like that. Perhaps jacked up by the very palpable, high-energy voltage of the streets or maybe as a clear-eyed form of aesthetic resistance to the clamour of the outside world of business at the speed of art, the artistic productions of *Disorientations and Echo* most definitely laid down a new art track for the twenty-first century – art at the speed of desolation cut with gestures of insurgent hopefulness. It's all there. It's all less an officially scripted art installation than a creative lesson in life itself where the key aesthetic attunement is this: the artistic imagination at its best is about cold-eyed realism to the cynicism of power and wild-eyed enthusiasm for the utopia of the creative human imagination. The sparks of energy that are generated by jamming together harsh political realism and the beautiful irreality of art – power and imagination – are just everywhere in this installation. In fact, *Disorientations and Echo* is what happens when the iron filings of the artistic imagination are thrown across the magnetic field of a city, a nation, a

world. On the outside, the surrounding city of Vancouver may appear to function as usual with its thick flows of traffic, real estate hype for luxury condos on the Pacific waterfront, a daily ticker tape of drug deals, domestic violence, and work life, and all that invisible pain and pleasure of relationships gone right and gone wrong, business deals triumphant or suddenly shattered on the rocks, with big dreams rising of futuristic remakes of the urban fabric. But step inside the aesthetic space of *Disorientations and Echo* and the narrative of life as usual breaks down in front of your art-bound eyes.

And why not? This is an installation about art from below, about narratives of life which are never allowed to register their aesthetic visions in the urban chronicle. Here, artists from the diaspora – Somalia, Ethiopia, Jamaica, and the other islands of the Caribbean, the other diasporas of the world – are finally given an opportunity to speak, and when they do the result is dazzling in its aesthetic complexity, intensely charged in its flows of complicated energy. All the lovely ghosts are present: the voiceless, the suppressed, all the perspectives previously outlawed, all the wonderfully unexpected drifts of the anti-aesthetic imagination traditionally excluded, silenced. Sometimes the art of *Disorientations and Echo* is explicit in its intentions, with the signage for one display signalling “cultural hybridity, the machinations and strange effects of globalization and the complex practices of decolonization.” Sometimes the art is stunningly silent, letting arrangements of mirrors and dust serve as visual gateways to better understanding the times in which we live. But always the art is ineffable and uncertain: a huge tree of life, the branches of which take on the shape of wooden yokes used in the slave trade; a neon fortune cookie that blossoms with cultural signification; a saw horse with ping pong balls for eyes, mop for hair, confetti for skin, just dripping with silver chains with gym shoes off to the side filled with mushrooms, sticks and stones, debris – diasporic bodies on the joyous mend; the unforgettable art of Jan Wade where whole rooms are filled with the vast space of her artistic imagination – funerary objects, row upon row of tightly stitched quilts which in their disciplined perfection capture the hard labour of cotton picking and brick laying in all the Americas of the diasporic imagination; and, of course, art of the ready-made taking the form of turbans unwrapped as hanging tapestries with their beautiful hues of memory or, for that matter, art of gender diasporas with eloquent writing running down the length of hanging scrolls telling the stories of women black and brown, trans and non-binary. In all these different art installations, the disorientation of life in the diaspora finds its waiting echo, but that echo has a beautiful artistic twist. In this case, the artistic “echo” in the different art practices featured in

Disorientations and Echo is most definitely not mimetic in relationship to the original sound but is instead fabulously unfaithful. Here, the consistent aesthetic gesture of *Disorientations and Echo* is represented by searing, yet often playful, artistic visions of diasporic life that possess such seductive creative intensity as to almost implode with a hallucinatory quality. And in that aesthetic implosion, the life-instinct returns to take full possession of *Disorientations and Echo*, making this a mesmerizing art exhibit that in every way – sculptures, painting, drawings, quilting, high gloss photography, low gloss drawings, wild installation practices, haunting sounds, bird nests in out-of-the-way ceiling corners, fables of dark matter (*Diogenes Begins his Search*), and “We the North” (*The Borealis Boys Bounce the Harpies*) – rejoices at the sounds and sights of the life-instinct pouring through the cracks in all its creativity, energy, and awe inspiring indeterminacy.

Quantum Manifesto

From *Disorientations and Echo* to Andy Warhol and beyond we join the riders of the Quantum Revolution, riders of the information storm of the quantum imagination. A storm that has arrived in the streets carrying with it the new “spectre” that haunts the quantum zone. And not only has the “spectre” taken over the streets but it invades the imagination – exorcising the debris left by the unholy alliances of the past. Moving to a new world on the digital wave where the particles of the technological revolution pose the challenge to go into the quantum zone where the future is with us.

A challenge to go forward with energetic art that is constantly being created, to new forms of participation with quantum citizens, to new bodies, speedrunners, for life on the run, to new schools that foster the creativity of the young, to read the works of Indigenous people and women long since neglected but with new insights, to new modes of politics, to new organizations of labour and management, to imaginative science and theories – all emerging from the virtual space/time we live in.

No longer seeking the sun god, nor chasing after the sun, nor Ezekiel’s chariot, nor John Locke’s shinning golden guinea, nor seeking to escape Plato’s cave – the sun has come to earth in the light rays of the quantum revolution. And with it comes the explosion of energy that we all possess in life in the zone. It is this life which must be continuously captured and renewed to fuel a better world. A world that is not limited to the deterministic thought of the past but open to the virtual. Where probabilities heretofore impossible become possible, become doable, because they are part of the ongoing life in the zone.

So, a Manifesto that calls to all. Calls to all to join what Albert Camus advocated: the bringing together of rebellion and art, calls to thinking at the meridian of that high noon where the sun shines down on the world and the world returns its energy in the creativity of the quantum imagination. Calls to join with the energy of the quantum waves and particles that will realize the *Quantum Revolution*.

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